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QUEENS OF  
BEAUTY . .

VOL. II









*From a mezzotint by J. Finlayson, after a painting by C. Read.*

*Elizabeth, Duchess of Hamilton & Brandon.*  
*"The Beautiful Sunning"*

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QUEENS OF BEAUTY

AND THEIR ROMANCES

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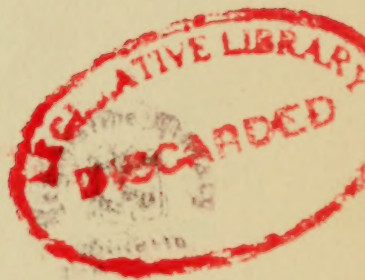
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W. WILLMOTT DIXON

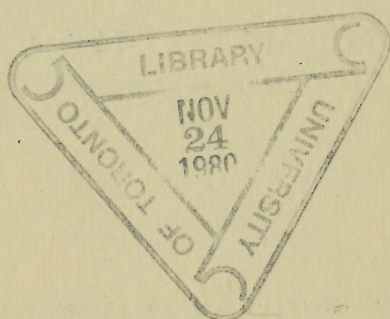
*Author of "Dainty Dames of Society," etc.*

WITH TWO PHOTOGRAVURE PLATES AND TWENTY-FOUR  
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# QUEENS OF BEAUTY

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## CHAPTER XIII

### THE ROMANCE OF TWO ROYAL DUCHESSSES

AN Act of Parliament is the last place in the world in which one would expect to find sentiment or romance concealed. And yet, for those who will trouble themselves to seek for such soft contraband, there is plenty among the dry archives of the Statute Book to reward the search of the literary gauger. One well-known and important legislative measure, at any rate, had its origin in a couple of romantic love affairs, to wit, the Royal Marriage Act passed in 1772, by which it is enacted that none of the descendants of George II., unless of foreign birth, can marry under the age of 25 without the consent of the sovereign: whilst at and after that age the consent of Parliament is necessary to render the marriage valid.

It was the wrath of George III., at the clandestine marriages of his two brothers, Henry Frederick

Duke of Cumberland, and William Henry Duke of Gloucester, which led to the passing of that Act, and though the step was something in the nature of locking the stable door after the steed was stolen, it relieved the outraged feelings of the king, and caused considerable trepidation and discomfort to the royal culprits and their spouses.

The Duke of Cumberland was the offender who incurred most odium and whose marriage provoked the king's deepest displeasure. For Henry Frederick was emphatically a "bad lot," and from the moment he came of age was a scandal to his family. This was partly owing, no doubt, to natural depravity, but partly also to the injudicious restraint exercised upon him by his mother so long as he was subject to her control. The Princess Dowager of Wales, widow of the worthless and profligate "Fred," whom his father and mother hated with a bitterness that was absolutely appalling, kept all her sons in the closest and most irksome seclusion until they attained their majority. The consequence was that Henry Frederick—who had no redeeming point but a handsome face—a young man of mean intellect and sensual tastes, burst out at once into a career of profligacy which shocked even the easy-going morality of those days.

When he was but two-and-twenty his name was mixed up, under peculiarly scandalous circumstances, with that of Henrietta Vernon, the beautiful young



Countess Grosvenor, and, for the first time in the history of England, a Prince of the Blood was dragged into a Court of Justice to defend himself on a charge of adultery. He had followed her from London to Eaton Hall, had disguised himself and taken lodgings at an inn in order to prosecute his intrigue, and the vain woman had granted him secret meetings. The earl, a notorious libertine himself, sued for a divorce and obtained it, with £10,000 damages against His Royal Highness. The letters from the lovers read in court excited mingled ridicule and disgust. "To the lady's honour be it said," wrote Horace Walpole, who revelled in such a delicious scandal, "that, bating a few oaths which sounded more masculine than tender, the advantage in grammar, spelling, and diction was all in her favour. His Royal Highness's diction and learning scarce exceeded that of a cabin boy!" The king had to find the money to pay the damages and costs, upwards of £13,000, and this circumstance was not calculated to increase his affection for his scapegrace brother. The duke was so enraged at the ridicule poured upon him that he abandoned his unhappy victim to her shame, thus proving himself as destitute of manliness as of morals. I do not propose to give further examples from the *chronique scandaleuse* of his amours, which were numerous, but I will come to the one creditable passion of his life.

In the season of 1771, he met at Brighton, or Brighthelmstone as it was then called, Mrs. Horton,

the beautiful young widow of Christopher Horton of Calton Park, Derbyshire, and fell madly in love with her. This lady's maiden name was Anne Luttrell, and she was the daughter of Simon Luttrell, Lord Irnham, afterwards Earl of Carhampton. The Luttrells had ever been a wild, lawless race, of the worst type of Anglo-Irish gentry—with all the vices of their English stock grafted on Hibernian recklessness. Colonel Luttrell, brother of the lovely Anne, was a notorious political swashbuckler, a deadly duellist, a man without fear and without principle, who proved extremely useful to the English Government when they wanted to put up a nominee for Middlesex against the ever-popular John Wilkes. Anne was the second and handsomest of three handsome sisters. The eldest, Elizabeth, rendered herself notorious in a manner to which I shall refer hereafter ; the youngest married a Captain Moriarty and lived the happiest and most uneventful life of the three. Anne wedded Christopher Horton, a sporting squire of Derbyshire. Horace Walpole says it was a love match, though it would seem that Mr. Horton was considerably older than his wife. At the age of twenty-two she lost her only child, an infant daughter, and her husband within a fortnight. She retired to Brighton in her widowhood, and her beauty soon attracted suitors, of whom the favoured one was General Smith, "a very handsome, well-built young man," and it was confidently expected by the gossips that she would marry him. And doubtless she would



*From an engraving by Cook, after the picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A.*

THE DUCHESS OF CUMBERLAND.





have done so, had not Henry Frederick Duke of Cumberland appeared upon the scene. The temptation of having a royal husband, and one whom she could twist round her little finger, was too strong to be resisted. For Mrs. Horton had made up her mind to be the lawful wife of her princely lover, and nothing less. She very soon let him know plainly that the only way to her affections was through the gates of matrimony. So one day they eloped to Calais and were legally wedded there on October 2nd, 1771.

The duke, who stood in wholesome awe of his mother, the Princess Dowager of Wales, and of his sober-minded brother, the king, was for keeping the marriage secret, and for a while his consort consented to this course. But by-and-by she grew tired of privacy, and of the company of her dull-witted husband. Proud and ambitious, she wanted to be presented at Court and enjoy the state for which she had married. She was quite confident that with her beauty and accomplishments she would outshine all her rivals. Mewed up there in Calais, she was, as she told her spouse, no better than a "virtuous mistress," and she insisted on receiving the recognition and status which belonged to her as the consort of a Prince of the Blood. At last she worried the duke into consenting to break the news to the king. Henry Frederick, for once in his life, grasped his nettle like a man of mettle, and crossed the Channel to make his confession to the king and abide the consequences.

He could not have chosen a more inopportune moment for his disclosure. His mother, the Princess Dowager of Wales, was at the point of death, the American colonists were showing alarming signs of disaffection, there were dissensions in the Cabinet—domestic and political troubles combined to fill the king's mind with worry and anxiety. And it was while George was thus distracted, that the brother, who had caused him hitherto nothing but scandal and shame, walking with him in the garden, suddenly and awkwardly thrust a letter into his hand. The king said : "I suppose I need not read this now?" and was about to put the letter in his pocket when the duke blurted out in great confusion : "Oh ! yes, sir, you must read it now !" The king glanced at it, and, as he read the clumsily expressed confession of the clandestine marriage, his wrath rose ; turning upon the crestfallen Henry Frederick, he exclaimed :

"You fool ! you blockhead ! you villain ! I tell you that woman shall never be a royal duchess—she shall never be anything."

"What shall I do then?" asked the duke pitifully.

"Go abroad till I can determine what to do."

Humbled and depressed, the duke returned to Calais to tell his wife of the manner in which the king had received his confession. But Anne had all her wits about her, and cheered up her stupid and despondent spouse by telling him that she would

soon bring the king to his knees. After a sufficient time had elapsed to let his Majesty's wrath cool, the duchess instructed her husband to write and say that she was *enceinte*, and shortly expecting her confinement—and that it was therefore imperative that the marriage should be speedily recognised. To which the king's reply was that he meant to guard his family from such marriages, and bring in an Act of Parliament which should make them invalid. The duke and duchess saw that no time was to be lost, and that they must at once return to England to make public the fact of their marriage.

They installed themselves at Cumberland Lodge—an act, some thought, of bad taste, but the king appears to have raised no objection to their making that their home. His Majesty, however, would have nothing to say to them—forbade them to come near the Court—and instructed the Lord Chamberlain to let every one know that “there was no road between Cumberland House and Windsor Castle”—that any one who visited the former would be denied admittance to the latter. Meanwhile, of course, there was great curiosity in society to see the heroine of this latest royal romance. Horace Walpole was one of the first to pass an opinion upon her. He writes to the Countess of Ossory :

“The new Princess of the Blood is a young widow of twenty-four, extremely pretty, not handsome, very well-made, with the most amorous eyes



in the world, and eyelashes a yard long. Coquette beyond measure, artful as Cleopatra, and completely mistress of all her passions and projects. Indeed eyelashes three-quarters of a yard shorter would have served to conquer such a head as she has turned."

That was his first impression of Anne, Duchess of Cumberland. Twenty years later, in his *Memoirs of the Reign of George II.*, he gave another portrait of her which, though more elaborate, is equally complimentary.

"She was rather pretty than handsome and had more the air of a woman of pleasure than a woman of quality, though she was well-made, was graceful and unexceptionable in her conduct and behaviour. But there was something so bewitching in her languishing eyes, which she could animate to enchantment if she pleased, and her coquetry was so active, so varied, and yet so habitual, that it was difficult not to see through it and yet as difficult to resist it. She danced divinely, and had a great deal of wit, but of the satiric kind : and, as she had haughtiness before her rise, no wonder she claimed all the observance due to her rank after she had become Duchess of Cumberland."

The alarming rumour that the king proposed bringing in an Act with stringent provisions against the contracting of clandestine marriages by members of the Royal Family, had the effect of forcing another pair of culprits into a confession of their secret. Like



a bombshell the news of the marriage of William Henry Duke of Gloucester and Lady Waldegrave dropped suddenly into the family circle at Windsor Castle, and caused the poor worried and harried monarch more surprise and pain than the escapade of the Duke of Cumberland. For the Duke of Gloucester was the king's favourite brother. They resembled one another in their characters and tastes—both were of a sober, religious turn of mind, and by the propriety of their lives formed a marked contrast to the rowdy Dukes of York and Cumberland. In his childhood the Duke of Gloucester suffered much from the cruelty of his mother, who was perpetually jeering at him for his dulness, and bidding her other children "laugh at the fool." One day, seeing the sensitive child hanging his head and looking very miserable, she cried out: "Now then, you little fool, you're sulking."

"No, I'm not sulking, I'm only thinking," replied the wretched butt of her sneers.

"And pray what may you be thinking of?" asked the princess scornfully.

"I was thinking," was the timid reply, "what I should feel if I had a son as unhappy as you make me."

When the duke was but nineteen he met Maria Frances Countess of Waldegrave, then a widow with three daughters, and without question one of the most beautiful and attractive women in England. Her history was a peculiar one. Horace Walpole's

elder brother, Sir Edward, had formed an intimacy with a milliner at Durham named Clements (*The Gentleman's Magazine* calls her Paxton) by whom he had four illegitimate daughters, all of whom subsequently married persons of high position. Even as a child, Maria Frances was remarkable for her ambitious views.

"I mean to be a grand lady," she said once to her father, when she was but a little child in short petticoats.

"That is impossible," said he, "for you're only a beggar, and it is right that you should know it."

With a saucy toss of her head she retorted: "Then I'll be a lady beggar."

She grew up into an extremely beautiful girl, and when she was but sixteen was married to James Earl of Waldegrave, who was not only old enough to be her father, but a singularly ugly man to boot. She became the mother of three lovely daughters, who are grouped together in a famous picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds. On her husband's death she was left with a comfortable jointure, and her great beauty attracted to her a host of suitors.

For some time the Duke of Portland seemed to be first in the running, but she at length gave him his *congé* and allowed the young Duke of Gloucester, then a simple impressionable youth, to take his place. For two years she kept him dangling at her heels, amid the sneers of the prudish, who would have it that the relations between the two were "unduly intimate."



*From an engraving by S. Bull, after a painting by  
Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A.*

MARIA, COUNTESS OF WALDEGRAVE, AFTERWARDS DUCHESS  
OF GLOUCESTER.





Finally, after consulting with her uncle and father, she wrote her royal lover a letter in which she begged him to cease his addresses, as she valued her honour too much to become his mistress, whilst she felt that she was of too little consideration to be his wife.

The love-sick duke, rather than lose the beautiful woman to whom he had given his heart, asked her to marry him. She consented, and they were married in her house in Pall Mall on September 6th, 1766, by her private chaplain, Dr. Norton. But the marriage was kept a profound secret even from her own relations. No one knew whether they were married or not, though every one could see that there was a close intimacy between them. The duke treated her with the most ceremonious respect before the world. The new livery worn by her servants was a cross between that of royalty and her own. Whenever she appeared in public the gentlemen of His Royal Highness's Household escorted her to her chair or carriage. But the most prying of Court gossips could not penetrate the mystery which surrounded their relationship.

At a magnificent masquerade given at Mrs. Cornelys's rooms in Soho Square on February 26th, 1770, the Duke and Lady Waldegrave appeared as Edward IV. and Elizabeth Woodville. Many people thought they saw a deliberate significance in the choice of these characters. "Methinks," writes Horace Walpole, "it was not very difficult to find out the meaning of those masks." But still Lady Waldegrave kept her

secret, and not even her own father knew of her marriage. Of course, when the Duke and Lady Waldegrave set out to travel together on the Continent there could be no doubt that their relations were those of husband and wife, whether they were formally married or not. His Royal Highness was taken seriously ill on his travels and Lady Waldegrave nursed him with the tenderest devotion. It was while they were at Florence that the news of the projected Royal Marriage Act reached them. They both felt that the time had come when their union should be made public, and they could no longer wait for that favourable moment when they might hope to find the king in an amiable and forgiving mood. It was unfortunate that the revelation had to be made to His Majesty when he was fuming with rage over a similar indiscretion committed by his brother of Cumberland, but there was no help for it.

The duchess broke the news to her father in the following letter, written from St. Leonards in May, 1772, which he described to his brother Horace as "one of the sweetest samples of sense, language, and goodness of heart that I ever saw." Here it is, and the reader can judge for himself or herself whether it deserves that eulogy :

"MY DEAR AND EVER HONOURED SIR,

"You cannot easily imagine how every past affliction has been increased to me by not being at

liberty to make you quite easy. The duty to a husband being superior to that we owe a father, I hope will plead my pardon : and that, instead of blaming my past reserve, you will think it commendable.

“ When the Duke of Gloucester married me, which was in September, 1766, I promised him upon no consideration in the world to own it, even to you, without his permission, which permission I never had till yesterday, when he arrived here in much better health, and looked better than I ever saw him ; yet, as you may suppose, much hurt at all that has passed in his absence, so much so, that I have had great difficulty to prevail upon him to let things as much as possible remain as they are. To secure my character without injuring his is the utmost of my wishes, and I daresay that you and all my relations will agree with me that I shall be much happier to be called Lady Waldegrave, and respected as the Duchess of Gloucester, than to feel myself the cause of his leading such a life as his brother (the Duke of Cumberland) does, in order for me to be called Your Royal Highness. I am prepared for the sort of abuse the newspapers will be full of. Very few people will believe that a woman will refuse to be called Princess if it is in her power. *To have the power* is my pride, and using it in some measure pays the debt I owe the duke for the honour he has done me. All I wish of my relations is that they will show the world they are satisfied with my conduct, yet seem to disguise their reasons. If ever



I am fortunate enough to be called the Duchess of Gloucester, there is an end almost of all the comforts I now enjoy, which, if things go on as they now do, are many."

But though the lady's father was ready enough with his forgiveness and in ecstasies over his daughter's conduct, the king was by no means equally impressed with her disinterestedness. He would have it that Lady Waldegrave, a woman of wisdom mature as her charms, had entrapped his brother into marriage. And when one considers that she was a widow of six-and-twenty, and he only a lad of nineteen, at the time they first met, I think that the king had good grounds for his charge against her. His Majesty spoke strongly of the marriage as a "highly disgraceful step," and was undoubtedly much troubled about it. It is said that he lay awake crying all night when he first heard the news. "I cannot deny," he said to Lord North, "that on the subject of the duke my heart is wounded : for I have ever loved him with the fondness one bears to a child."

Then there was some doubt as to the legality of the marriage. Dr. Norton, who had performed the ceremony, was dead, and the duke had stipulated that there should be no witnesses. The king professed to have doubts as to whether the duke had been legally married, and coldly notified his brother that he should take steps to inquire into the legality of the ceremony



before recognising the marriage. This delay was terrible to the duke, for his wife was very near her first confinement ; and, harassed with anxiety and fear of disgrace, he wrote to the king and asked that the great officers of state might attend his wife's accouchement in recognition of her status as a Royal Princess. The king took no notice of the appeal. The distracted duke wrote again, with firmness and dignity, declaring his intention of appealing to the House of Lords if the king still refused his consent. This had the desired effect. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor and two other noblemen, accompanied by two King's Counsel, waited on the duke and duchess, who had the Bishop of Exeter with them to give evidence on their behalf. Addressing the committee of inquiry, the duke said :

“ Your lordships remember that I was at the point of death at Florence. At that awful moment I called for Colonel Rainsford. I told him I was married. I then enjoined him on his duty to a dying master, as soon as he should have closed my eyes, to hasten to England and repair to the king and declare my marriage and say that my last request was that His Majesty would allow a small pittance to the widow of his favourite brother. My lords, Colonel Rainsford took notes of what was said : he has them in his pocket and shall read them. And now, my lords, your lordships will not wonder that the last thoughts of a dying man turned on the woman he loved.”

He then called on the Bishop of Exeter to state what he knew. The bishop said : That when a marriage bill was brought in he thought it right to question Lady Waldegrave, then on a visit at his deanery. "I went into her room," he added, "and, telling her my reasons for inquiry, I asked whether she was married.

"She burst into a flood of tears and cried : 'I am ! I am married !' and then falling into a great agony, she wrung her hands and exclaimed : 'Good God ! what have I done ? I have betrayed the duke, and broken my promise to him !'"

With this evidence the committee of inquiry professed to be satisfied, but in their report to the king, whilst admitting that there was no doubt a marriage had taken place, they omitted the word "legal." The duke considered the omission fatal to the legitimacy of his offspring. The situation was desperate ; within a few hours a child would be born, which might be stamped with the indelible brand of illegitimacy. It was late in the evening when the duke received a copy of the depositions of the Archbishop and Lord Chancellor. He posted off at once to the archbishop's palace. It was after ten o'clock when he arrived ; the Archbishop and the Bishop of London, who was his guest, were just retiring to their bedrooms. But the duke insisted on seeing them—told them his dilemma, and urged them to go at once to the king and say that if His Majesty still had any doubts as

to the legality of the marriage, he would remove them.

"We cannot go at this hour of the night," pleaded the archbishop.

"You shall not lay your heads on your pillows till you have seen him," said the duke resolutely.

So they went. The king suggested that his brother had better be married over again, but this the duke emphatically refused to do. His marriage was legal and binding, and he was not going to admit any doubt on the subject. At last the king yielded and the marriage was formally recognised, but only just in time, for twenty-four hours later the duchess gave birth to a son.

A few months later, in spite of great opposition, the Royal Marriage Act was passed. It was a most unpopular measure at the time, but it still remains in force. The first to come under its prohibitory clauses was the Duke of Sussex, whose marriage with the Lady Augusta Murray, solemnised in 1793, was pronounced illegal in 1794, and the claims of their son, Sir Augustus D'Este, declared invalid by the House of Lords on July 9th, 1844.

The Cumberlands had been defiant in their attitude to the king after the revelation of their marriage. The Gloucesters were humble. Indeed, their humility was a little too pronounced. Horace Walpole, like the keen-eyed man of the world he was, saw through his niece's extravagant submissiveness. "Her am-



bition," he said, "which is her prevailing passion, will not long be smothered." And it was not. She was soon holding her *levées*, and the milliner's daughter bore herself as proudly as any of her more highly born rivals. She let every one know that she was a Princess of the Blood and meant to exact to the uttermost iota the respect due to her rank. But withal she was tactful. The conduct of herself and her husband was so irreproachable that in the end they wore out the king's hostility and became on the friendliest terms of intimacy with both George and Charlotte. There was a sweetness and charm about the duchess's manners which, added to her striking beauty, made her irresistible.

But it is sad to have to relate that the Duke of Gloucester did not sustain to the end the character of devoted husband, which he had so admirably filled during the desperate struggle for the royal recognition. In later years he became estranged from his amiable and charming wife, and fell into the toils of Lady Almeria Carpenter, one of the most beautiful women of her time. The Duchess Maria was far too high-spirited to brook any rival, and, unlike most of the Princesses of the Blood, who accepted their husbands' infidelities as a matter of course, she resented the duke's illicit attachment—insisted upon a legal separation, and obtained it. The closing years of her life were passed in dignified retirement. Her charity to the poor was proverbial,



and when she died, somewhat suddenly, at her house in Brompton, on August 23rd, 1807, just two years after her husband's death, it was not the grand State funeral awarded her that was the truest tribute to her worth, but the tears of the women and children, whose homes she had brightened and whose sorrows she had relieved, who lined the long, unlovely Brompton Road as their beloved benefactress was borne to her last resting-place in the Chapel of St. George at Windsor.

Far less happy was the life of her rival, Anne Duchess of Cumberland. Her husband was an object of contempt and scorn, with whom no decent man would associate. Yet so great was her own power of fascination, that the duchess not only gathered round her some persons of position and repute in her house at Carlton Terrace, but she actually forced the king and queen to receive her at Court. Her personal attractions were equal to those of her sister-in-law, and Lord Hervey says that, "No woman of her time performed the honours of her drawing-room with such grace, affability, and dignity." But between herself and the Duchess of Gloucester there was a deadly hatred. For this Maria was to blame, for when Anne proposed that, as they were both in the same boat, they should join their forces and, by appearing with their husbands in the same box at the opera, show that they intended to present a united front to the enemy, Maria scornfully replied : "Never !

I would not smell at the same nosegay with her in public."

After that, of course, it was war to the knife between them, and proud Anne Luttrell must have felt bitterly humiliated when she saw her own receptions unattended and ignored and the gates of Windsor Castle shut in the faces of herself and her husband, whilst the *levées* of her sister-in-law were patronised by the *élite* of society, and the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, with their two children, were basking in the sunshine of the royal smile. As I have said, she finally succeeded in intimidating the king and queen into receiving her at Court, but the way in which both their Majesties snubbed her made her feel that she had paid dearly for the empty honour.

Then she and her husband hit upon a scheme of revenge—which was devilish in its cruelty and malignity. They lured the young Prince of Wales to their house. Anne wove over him the spells of beauty and fascination, and the two encouraged him in gaming and drinking till they had completely demoralised him. I will not say that there was no vice inherent in the prince, who was afterwards our gracious sovereign George IV., but I firmly believe that he would never have been the heartless, shameless profligate he became, but for the insidious influence of his uncle and aunt, the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland. She used all the witchery of her beauty

to lure him to her house. She flattered and cajoled him as only a lovely and charming woman can, and, once there, her debauched, besotted husband tempted him to the indulgence in every vice calculated to deprave his mind and wreck his morals. Anything more infamous than the conduct of the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland towards the young Prince of Wales I cannot conceive. But, if revenge were their object, they certainly attained it. They had the satisfaction of knowing that the hearts of the king and queen were wrung with anguish at the sight of their eldest son's moral degradation.

The duke died in 1790, at the age of forty-five. He was a man without a single redeeming virtue, so far as I can discover, unless there be something redeeming in the facts that he had some musical taste, was a passionate admirer of the charming songstress, Mrs. Billington, and made a collection of musical instruments which was sold for a considerable sum after his death. It was alleged that he had contracted a marriage with Olive Wilmot, before his union with Mrs. Horton, and as late as 1866 a Mrs. Lavinia Ryves, who claimed to be a granddaughter of "Olive Princess of Cumberland" revived these claims. Her case came before the Court of Queen's Bench, but the documents and signatures on which she relied, were so palpably forgeries that her suit was dismissed with contumely.

The duchess survived her husband twenty years,

and died in 1810, retaining much of her beauty and charm to the last. For many years her eldest sister, Elizabeth, had planted herself upon her, and was a perpetual thorn in her side. For Elizabeth, besides being indescribably coarse in her manners and speech, was a gambler of the lowest type, who did not scruple to cheat on every available opportunity. The duchess shielded her from the consequences of her misdeeds, but when she died Elizabeth was left without any friend or protector, and, being hopelessly in debt, was committed to prison. But by a bribe of £50 she induced a hairdresser to marry her, and as by the then law a husband assumed all his wife's debts, she was discharged from jail and went abroad. There she fell from bad to worse, till at last she was convicted of picking pockets in Augsburg, and sentenced to clean the streets chained to a wheelbarrow. From this crowning ignominy, however, she saved herself by taking poison. That was the end of Elizabeth, the last survivor of the three beautiful Luttrells, and the sister of a Princess of the Blood.



## CHAPTER XIV

### “THE WILD IRISH GIRL”

FEW women have made more enemies or have been more fiercely attacked and bitterly abused than Sydney Owenson, better known by her married name of Lady Morgan. And I think it must be admitted, even by her friends, that she brought most of those attacks upon herself. A fearless free-lance, she dashed into society and ran amok against all the most cherished prejudices and beliefs of orthodoxy. Holding such broad and liberal opinions as she did on politics, religion, and morals, it was not surprising that the champions of all that was narrow and bigoted and conventional—of the dogmas of the majority in short—should have swooped down upon her with fell intent to crush her by fair means or foul. It was an age when critics were as savage and ruthless as Red Indian braves on the war-path. They were destitute alike of chivalry and the sense of justice. They spared neither man nor woman, age nor youth, but remorselessly tomahawked and scalped all who did not speak their shibboleth or subscribe to their creed. They attacked not only the public but the private characters of the men

and women who differed from them in political or religious views, with a coarseness, a brutality, a ferocity amazing in men of culture and scholarship, whom the benign influence of art and letters might have been expected to soften and humanise. We know from Sir George Trevelyan's biography of his uncle that Macaulay was an amiable, generous, and large-hearted man, yet when he had a political opponent to criticise he was neither just nor generous. There is, perhaps, nothing in English literature less defensible than his attack upon John Wilson Croker, which was avowedly dictated by pure personal and political hatred, by the very motives, in fact, the consciousness of which should have deterred any high-minded man with a sense of justice from undertaking the task to which the brilliant essayist applied himself with malignant gusto. If Macaulay could do this and could find warm defenders of his action, what wonder that men without his natural good qualities should take still further licence! These were the men who defamed Lady Morgan's character and spat their venomous spite at her, in language which the foulest-mouthed fishfag of Billingsgate could scarcely have surpassed in coarseness. As a natural consequence her biographers, Miss Jewsbury and Mr. Hepworth Dixon, and in a lesser degree Mr. J. Fitzpatrick, have in their eagerness to refute these calumnies given a portrait of Lady Morgan, which runs to the other extreme and is painted with a far too flattering brush. By judiciously steering



*From a picture by G. Behnes in the possession of Mrs. Geale.*

LADY MORGAN.  
(Sydney Owenson.)





between the two I think we may arrive at something approaching a true presentment of a very remarkable and original character.

For the details of her early life we are almost entirely dependent upon Lady Morgan herself, and she, like George Borrow, had such an ineradicable habit of weaving fiction with fact that it is impossible to accept her statements as absolutely true. Here, for example, is her own description of the circumstances attending her birth:

“In the hour when I first drew breath, and felt life’s first inaugural sensation—pain—the world took part in the hour and the day. I was born on *Christmas Day*; in that land where all holy days are religiously celebrated, as testimonials to faith, and are excuses for festivity—in ‘Ancient Ould Dublin.’

“Bells tolled, carols were intoned, the streets resounded with joyous sounds, chimneys smoked, and friends were preparing to feast the fasters of the previous week in that most Catholic of countries. . . . Guests were assembled, and all awaited the announcing hour as it struck from the belfry of St. Patrick’s Cathedral.

“There was, however, on that joyous night, one round table distinguished above most others, by the wit and humour of the *convives*. The master of the feast was as fine a type of the Irish gentleman as Ireland ever set forth. His name was Robert Owenson ; beside him sat one whose name in Ireland

was long celebrated, and is not forgotten, as belonging to one of the greatest wits of his country and time—Edward Lysaght, long the captain of the University boys, that formidable body of learned and privileged insubordinates, who had lately been admitted to the Irish bar. Others there were also, though then unknown to fame, except for their social endowments.

“The lady who had the best right to preside on the occasion of this most Christian festival, as she was herself the sincerest of Christians and best of women, had retired early in the evening to her chamber on the plea of ‘indisposition,’ but still not deeming it indicative of any immediate catastrophe. But before the great clock of St. Patrick had chimed out the second hour of the new-born anniversary, another birth had taken place, and was announced by a joyous gossip to the happy father, who instantly disappeared. The guests, far from dispersing, waited for him (though not with empty glasses), and when he returned, nearly an hour afterwards, and announced the birth of ‘a dear little Irish girl—the very thing I have always wished for!’ the intelligence was responded to by a half-suppressed cheer, mellow as a Low Mass, and hearty wishes of long life to her!”

As a matter of fact, there is good reason for supposing that Sydney was born on board the packet, sailing between Liverpool and Kingstown, and the version which she gives of the event bears about as much resemblance to the reality, as Serjeant Buzfuz’s

pathetic picture of the death of Mr. Bardell bore to the actual circumstances surrounding the decease of that bibulous exciseman.

As to the date of her birth—that must ever remain a mystery. It was a sort of “movable feast”; she postdated it to suit her fancy. “What has a woman to do with dates?” she exclaims contemptuously, in her autobiography. “Cold, false, erroneous, chronological dates! I mean to have none of them.” She was probably at least six years older than she stated herself to be. Her father, Robert Owenson, was an Irishman and an actor; her mother was the daughter of a Shrewsbury tradesman named Hill, who rose to be mayor of the town. Round both of them Sydney has thrown the mantle of romance—but particularly round her father. As portrayed by his devoted daughter, he stands out a picturesque figure, the descendant of an ancient and honourable Irish house, a man of wit and genius—the associate of men of rank and fashion, of celebrities in literature and politics—a brilliant, attractive and lovable personality. In point of fact, he was a thriftless, dissipated, amusing, raffish Irishman, with a strong dash of Captain Costigan about him. But Sydney saw him through the rose-coloured spectacles of a glowing fancy. She created a hero out of him, and she worshipped her own creation with a tender, passionate, devoted constancy which is infinitely pathetic.

Of her mother she says: “Her greatest anxiety



was for the education of her little girls, and her next for the salvation of mankind through the influence of the Countess of Huntingdon."

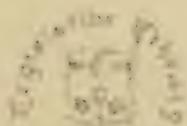
How Miss Jane Hill ever came to marry Robert Owenson is a mystery. She was a matter-of-fact woman, of strict religious views, she looked with abhorrence on the stage, and yet she ran away with a dissolute, irreligious young Irish actor, who had nothing but his handsome face and his plausible manners to recommend him. Owenson, who had a fine voice, had come over to England to study music under the patronage of a wealthy country gentleman named Blake, but lost his patron through a *liaison* with Madame Weichsel (the mother of Mrs. Billington), then *prima donna* at His Majesty's Theatre. He had then applied to Oliver Goldsmith, with whom he claimed some distant relationship, and the good-natured poet introduced him to Garrick, who gave him an engagement, insisting, however, that he should change his name from MacOwen (his original patronymic) to Owenson. The young Irishman was entrusted with the part of Tamerlane, in Rowe's tragedy of that name, but proved a dismal failure, largely owing to his brogue, which the Londoners would not stand at any price.

Meanwhile Owenson had been improving his education at the academy of a Mr. Eyles in Bloomsbury, where one of his fellow students was a youngster named Hill. When Hill's father was made Mayor



of Shrewsbury there was open house, and the young man brought down with him his friend Owenson. It was thus that Jane Hill and Robert Owenson met. Subsequently she came up to London to stay with a relation and renewed her acquaintance with the young actor, who proposed and was accepted. The parents of the bride, however, strongly objected to the match, and, as there was no prospect of their relenting, Jane and Robert took the law into their own hands and were clandestinely married. To pacify his wife, whose prejudice against the stage was ineradicable, Owenson took up oratorio, but though his voice qualified him for success in that line, his heart was in the theatre.

Not much is told by Sydney of her mother's life after she went to Ireland with her husband. The good woman must have been ill at ease amongst her Irish surroundings. For a while the family lived actually *in* the Dublin theatre, with which Owenson was connected. They took their meals in the green room and the children played hide-and-seek among the properties. Mrs. Owenson died twelve years after her marriage, leaving two daughters, Sydney and Olivia, to the care of their Bohemian father, who, finding himself hampered by these two motherless maidens, placed them at a good school at Clontarf, and, if we are to believe his daughter, underwent many privations in order to give his little girls the best education possible. "I remember once," says Lady Morgan, "our music mistress, Miss Buck, complained



to my father of our idleness, as he sat beside us at the piano, whilst we stumbled through a duet from the overture to *Artaxerxes*. His answer was simple and graphic ; for, drawing up the sleeve of a handsome surtout great-coat which he wore, he showed the shabby, threadbare sleeve of the black coat beneath, and said, touching the whitened seams, ‘I should not be driven to the subterfuge of wearing a great-coat this hot weather to conceal the poverty of my dress beneath, if it were not that I wish to give you the advantage of such instruction as you are now neglecting.’ This went home, and Miss Buck had nothing to complain of during the remainder of our tuition.”

The excellent Owenson had meanwhile opened, under distinguished patronage, a playhouse at Kilkenny with the imposing title of “The National Theatre.” Kilkenny, Lady Morgan assures us, was then, “in point of rank and fashion the Versailles of Ireland.” The theatre was voted “most elegant,” and subscriptions poured in liberally enough—*on paper*. The only subscription, however, which was paid up was that of £50, with which Lord Ormonde headed the list. Everybody took boxes, but few paid for them. Orders were given in profusion. The house was always filled, and the prospects of the manager seemed brilliant. Moreover, the versatile Owenson added to his theatrical speculation one in wine. A confiding firm at Bordeaux entrusted him with a cargo of claret

which was stored in the vaults under the theatre. But Owenson had no head for business, and muddled both speculations. He had mortgaged the theatre for £500 before it was finished. The mortgagee foreclosed, the consignors of the cargo of claret pressed for payment, there was no money to meet either claim, and Robert Owenson became bankrupt.

The two girls, Sydney and Olivia, were then in Dublin lodgings, with a faithful old servant, Molly Kane, to look after them. And it was at this crisis that Sydney showed what true grit there was in her. With a spirit of resolution, rare indeed in so young a woman, she determined to be no longer a burden upon her father. That she had some literary gifts she was certain. Indeed, the vanity of her father had led him to publish some time before *Poems by a Young Lady between the Age of Twelve and Fourteen*, of which Sydney herself frankly says, “They had all the faults of tiresome precocity, which is frequently disease, and generally terminates in dullness.” Her thoughts turned first, then, towards literary work. But I will let her tell the story in her own charming way. In a letter to her father she thus announces her intention :

“Now for all this, dear sir, we must relieve you from the terrible expense you have been at for our education. Of *this* I am resolved to relieve you and to earn money for you, instead of spending the little you will have for some time to come. . . . Now, dear



papa, I have two novels nearly finished. If I had time and quiet to finish them I am *sure* I could sell them : and observe, sir, Miss Burney got £3,000 for *Camilla*, and brought out *Evelina* unknown to her father : but all this will take time. . . . Dr. Pellegrini approves of my intention, which is simply for the present to go as instructress or companion to young ladies."

Let me say here that Sydney Owenson's letters are so delightful, so bright, fresh and entertaining that I make no apology for quoting liberally from them, for they are a revelation of her charming personality. Here is the next epistle, in which she tells her father how she fared in her endeavours to find employment as a governess :

"Well, sir, on arriving home what should I find but a note from Dr. Pellegrini relative to my intentions, which, to tell you the truth, I had explained to him, saying that the Rev. Mr. Peter Lefanu, a celebrated preacher, would call on me the next day at one o'clock. He had given him a commission to find a young lady who would act as something between a governess and a *dame de compagnie* to two young ladies, daughters of the Right Honourable Charles Sheridan, Secretary of War for Ireland, and the husband of that beautiful woman, who, you may remember, put out the fire of the curtain of her box at the theatre last winter, when the whole house rose up to applaud. Well, the idea of this visit from Mr. Lefanu frightened



me beyond everything. I was so utterly unprepared for it; and Olivia positively refused to be in the room. However, I was dressed very nicely, and seated on the sofa all in good time, and I took up *Locke*, ‘to call up a look,’ as Mrs. Pentweazel [a character in Sam Foote’s farce, *Taste*] says, when I heard his knock at the door. Molly announced him, ‘The Rev. Mr. Peter ——,’ but could get no further, she was in such a rage. Well, now, dear papa, who do you think he turned out to be? Why, the clergyman who preached the charity sermon at the Lying-in Hospital last Christmas, and that we all cried at hearing, and you said, ‘That man is a regular pick-pocket, for I have given a crown, and I did not mean to give half.’ Well, he took my hand and we sat down. He looked very earnestly at me and said:

“‘Are you the young lady of whom Dr. Pellegrini was speaking last night as wishing to enter on a very important situation?’

“I said, ‘Yes, sir, I believe so.’

“‘Are you Miss Owenson, my dear—daughter of my old friend, Mr. Owenson of the Theatre Royal?’

“I was ready to burst into tears, and could only answer, ‘Yes, sir.’

“‘But you are very young, my dear; I should say you were fitter to go to school than to commence instructress.’

“‘Perhaps so, sir; but great misfortunes have come upon poor papa unexpectedly, and——’

“Here I was obliged to cover my face with my handkerchief. I suppose to give me time to recover, he gently drew *Locke* out of my hand, and appeared to be looking through it.

“‘Upon my word,’ said he, laughing, ‘this is a very grave study for so young a lady. Now let me hear your definition of an “innate idea.”’

“He looked so comical that I could not help laughing too.

“‘Oh, my dear, don’t hurry yourself; it is a question might puzzle a conjurer.’

“‘Well, sir,’ I said, ‘I had no idea of *you* until I saw and heard you preach your beautiful sermon for the poor women of the Lying-in Hospital; but, having seen and heard you, I have an idea of you which can never be removed.’

“He actually threw himself back in his chair, and took my hand, and—would you believe it, papa?—kissed it. He is of French descent, you know.

“‘Well,’ said he, ‘you are the most flattering little logician I ever coped with.’ He then took a serious tone, and said, ‘My dear little girl, I respect your intentions; and, from what Dr. Pellegrini tells me, your acquirements fit you for the situation you are seeking; but you have at present one great fault. Don’t be frightened’ (I suppose I looked so); ‘it is one will mend but too soon. The Misses Sheridan are, I should think, much about your own age, and the worst of it is, there are two rascally boys, Charles

and Tom, who have the bad habit of running into their sisters' study when they come home for vacation, and making a terrible row there. However, I shall meet Mr. and Mrs. Sheridan at dinner to-day at my brother's, Mr. Joe Lefanu's, who is married to their sister. We will talk this over, and you shall hear from me early to-morrow.'

“He now rose, and as he deposited *Locke* on the table, he took up a dirty little volume of my poems which lay beside it.

“‘*Pardi!*’ he said in some surprise, ‘you are a poetess too, are you?’

“And then he read aloud, and most beautifully too, my little stanzas to you on receiving your picture, and then rolling up the book put it into his pocket without ceremony; and, with a cordial shake of the hand and a *je me sauve*, disappeared—and so ended this awful visit, which, though it left me agitated, left me delighted with what I had done, and so will you be some day, dear papa.

“I am so tired I can write no more to-day; but we are both well, and both in love with the Rev. Mr. Lefanu, for Olivia had her head through the door of the back drawing-room all the time making faces at me!”

The Sheridan scheme, however, fell through. “The beautiful Mrs. Sheridan would not have me,” writes Sydney plaintively. But she had hardly time to feel her disappointment before another opening presented

itself, through the kindness of her friends the Fontaines, of which she wrote the following account to her father :

"CASTLETOWN, DELVIN, WESTMEATH.

"DEAREST SIR,

"The reason I have not written to you for some days is that I have so much to say, and so much that I was afraid of saying, that I thought it better to say nothing at all ; which 'all,' I think, will surprise you—and for myself *je n'en reviens pas* !

"Well, last Thursday Mr. Fontaine enclosed me a note from a lady, Mrs. Featherstone, of Bracklin Castle, intimating her desire to have just such a charming young person as myself ! as governess or companion to her two daughters ; the eldest just returned from a great finishing school, Madame Lafarrelle's, and the younger who has never left home.

"Mrs. Featherstone was for a few days at her mother's, the Dowager Lady Steele's in Dominic Street, but anxious not to lose a moment, and would send her carriage for the young lady M. Lafontaine had mentioned in his letter (Miss Owenson) if he would send her address.' And so he did, and so the carriage came, and so I went, rather down-hearted from my former disappointments.

"You know what a fine street Dominic Street is, and so close to my old school. Well, a handsome mansion, two servants at the door, my name taken, and I was ushered at once into a large and rather gloomy parlour, in the centre of which two ladies



were sitting at a table. The one at the head of the table, a most remarkable figure both in person and costume, but who bore her ninety years with a considerable confidence in her own dignity. She sat with her head thrown back, her little sharp eyes twinkling at me as I entered, and her mouth pursed up to the dimensions of a parish poor-box. She wore a fly-cap (of which I have taken the pattern), on her silver but frizzled hair—her very fair face was drawn into wrinkles, as though engraved with a needle over her delicate features, and when I tell you what I have since heard, that she was the rival and friend of the beautiful Lady Palmer, the belle of Lord Chesterfield’s court, and the subject of his pretty verses which you used to recite so often, you will allow that she had every right to wrinkles and the remains of beauty.

“Seated near her at the same table, and writing, was a sweet, charming, good-humoured-looking lady, who got up to receive me in the most cordial manner, whilst two nice girls, the eldest already apparently in her teens, struggled to get me a chair, and then stationed themselves one each behind their mamma and grandmamma.

“Mrs. Featherstone opened the conversation by telling me that she had been a pupil of Mr. Fontaine’s as her daughters were now, and that he was the best of human beings.

“‘That is nothing to the purpose,’ said the old lady sharply; ‘come to the point with this young

person, as you know you have no time to lose,' and turning to me, she said, 'You are very young to offer yourself for so important a situation.'

"The two girls looked at me as much as to say, 'Don't mind grandmamma,' and Mrs. Featherstone added :

" 'Dear mamma, now, you must leave Miss Owenson to me,' and then she said to me, 'I assure you, my dear, I am much prepossessed in your favour by all our good Fontaine has told me of you ; and your being so merry and musical, as he tells me you are, is very much in your favour with us, for we are rather dull and mopy.'

" 'But to begin,' interposed Lady Steele again, 'what will this young person expect? She cannot offer herself as a regular governess, she is so very young.'

"The girls winked at me, and grimaced again.

" 'She shall first offer herself as my visitor at Bracklin Castle for the Christmas holidays,' said Mrs. Featherstone, kindly, 'and then we shall see how we get on and suit one another, which I am sure we shall very well.'

"The old lady said, knocking her hand on the table, 'I never heard such nonsense in all my life.'

"At this moment the footman came in to announce that the carriage was at the door, followed by a handsome, jolly-looking woman, the lady's maid, with Mrs. Featherstone's bonnet.

“Mrs. Featherstone said : ‘Come, my dear, and I will set you down, and we will have a little talk by the way, for I have an appointment which hurries me away at present.’ The two girls ran after us and said : ‘Do come to us ; we shall be so happy at Bracklin, and never mind grandmamma—nobody does,’ and with this dutiful observation they shook hands cordially with me, and I drove off with my bran-new friend. What was amusing in all this was—that I never opened my lips till I got into the carriage, when I thanked Mrs. Featherstone for her kind reception, and cordially accepted her invitation to Bracklin.”

Sydney was naturally excited over this visit, which seemed about to open a new life to her, and she and her “darling Livy” and good old Molly Kane had many anxious confabulations over the necessary preparations.

The Fontaines gave a farewell party on the eve of her departure, and it was arranged that she was to start from their house. The mail-coach passed the top of the street, the guard promised to blow his horn and to give timely warning, and the guests in a body were to escort her to the coach. But, in the excitement of dancing, no one thought of the time, and Sydney was merrily footing it with her partner when the horn sounded. There was a frantic rush, and faithful old Molly had only just time to fling her own warm cloak over the girl’s shoulders and

clap an old bonnet on her head before they were all racing for the mail. The guard's patience was nearly exhausted as the belated passenger came up breathless, and she and her luggage were bundled into the coach, which quickly whirled Sydney away from her friends. But her worst misadventure was to come. At one of the stages where she wanted to change her attire, she found, to her dismay, that her portmanteau and parcels had been sent off in the wrong coach.

"Fancy, dear papa," she writes, "my dreadful situation. . My whole stock-in-trade consisted of a white muslin frock, pink silk stockings, and pink silk shoes, with Molly's warm cloak and an old bonnet." How she made her appearance at Bracklin she thus describes :

"The approach to the domain was announced by a civilised-looking lodge ; large, beautiful iron gates, opened by a fairy child, and all that lay within was cultivated and promising, leading to a large, handsome mansion of white stone. Two carriages were rolling before the door, at which stood two footmen, who at once ushered me into a handsome drawing-room, to a party of ladies muffled in carriage dresses, who stood in a circle round the fire. Pinched, cold, confused and miserable, as you may suppose, dear papa, I must have been—in my pink shoes and stockings. I perceived that my appearance excited a general titter : but dear Mrs. Featherstone and her girls came to my relief, and welcomed me and kissed me ; but Mr.



Featherstone—a grave, stern-looking man, who sat apart reading his newspaper—he just raised his eyes above his glasses, and I read in his glance condemnation of his lady’s indiscretion in bringing *such* a being for such a purpose as I had come.

“Mrs. Featherstone inquired how I had come to travel in so light a dress ; and so, dear papa, I thought I had better tell the story as it happened—and so I did—from the little *bal d’adieu* at dear old Fontaine’s, till I reached Bracklin gates, not forgetting the port-manteau and the little bundle left behind. Well, you have no idea how it took ! They screamed at the fun of my details, and I heard them mutter, ‘ Dear little thing ! ’ ‘ Poor little thing ! ’ The two girls carried me off from them all, to my own rooms, the prettiest suite you ever saw—a study, a bedroom, and a bathroom—a roaring turf fire in the rooms, an open piano, and lots of books scattered about !

“ Betty Kenny, the old nurse—the ‘ Molly ’ of the establishment—brought me in a bowl of laughing potatoes, and *such* fresh butter, and gave such a hearty ‘ Much good may it do you, miss ’ ; and didn’t I tip her a word of Irish, which delighted her. Pen, ink, and paper were brought to me, and I was left to myself to rest and write to dear Olivia a line just to announce my arrival here, which was sent to the post for me.

“ The girls brought me, I believe, half their mamma’s and all their own wardrobe to dress me out ; and as they are all little, it answered very well. Well, sir,

when I went down, the carriages and party had drawn off to spend two days at Sir Thomas Featherstone's.

"Our dinner-party were mamma and the two young ladies ; two itinerant preceptors—Mr. O'Hanlon, writing and elocution master, and a dancing master ; and Father Murphy, the P.P.—such fun !—and the Rev. Mr. Beaufort, curate of Castletown, Delvin.

"The dinner was perfectly delicious !

"Well, I was in great spirits ; and Mrs. Featherstone drew out the two tutors, I think on purpose. She made Mr. O'Hanlon—a most coxcomical writing-master—tell me his story ; how he was the prince of nearly all he surveyed, if he had his rights, being descended from the Princes O'Hanlon. Now, papa, *you* know that if there is anything I am strong on, it is an Irish song—thanks to you—especially 'Emunch ach Nuic' (Ned o' the hills), which song I sang for them afterwards by the bye, and did I not take his pride down a peg, and get him in such a passion ! The servants laughed and stuffed their napkins down their throats till they were almost suffocated. James Moran, the butler, winking at the priest all the time, who enjoyed the joke more than any one, except the dancing master, his rival, who is a very clever man, I am told, and teaches mathematics besides. Well, sir, we got so merry, that at last Father Murphy proposed my health in this fashion—which will make you smile. He stood up with his glass of port wine in his hand, and first bowing to Mrs. Featherstone, said, 'With

your lave, madam' ; and then turning to me he said, 'This is a hearty welcome to ye to Westmeath, Miss Owenson ; and this is to yer health, mind and body,' which made them all laugh till they were ready to fall under the table.

"Well, after dinner I sang them 'Emunch ach Nuic,' and 'Cruel Barbara Allen,' which had an immense effect.

"After tea, James Moran announced that the piper had come from Castletown to 'play in Miss Owenson,' upon which the girls immediately proposed a dance in the back hall ; and when I told them I was a famous jig dancer they were perfectly enraptured. So we set to, all the servants crowding round the two open doors in the hall.

"I, of course, danced with the 'Professor,' and Prince O'Hanlon with Miss Featherstone, and Miss Margaret with the Rev. Mr. Beaufort. It is a pity we had no spectators beyond the domestics, for we all really danced beautifully ; and considering this was my first jig in company, I came off with flying colours, and so ends my first day in Bracklin. And I think, dear papa, you have no longer any reason to be uneasy at my position or angry with my determination, and so God bless you. I shall write to you now once a week, loving you better and better every day.

"Your own,

"SYDNEY."

Unlike Charlotte Brontë, Sydney Owenson had on the whole a happy time as a governess. Her talents, her brightness, her wit, her buoyant spirits made her a fascinating acquisition to the domestic circle of a country house, and the Featherstones appreciated her gifts. But her heart was still set upon authorship. Oddly enough, it was the singing of Tom Moore that gave the stimulus to her literary ambition. She had been invited with her sister to a party at which Moore was to sing some of his own songs. "Two scrubby-headed and very ill-dressed little girls stood niched in a corner near to the piano," to quote her own description, "and were affected to tears by the singer's rendering of his own melodies." But the effect produced was not altogether what the poet would have felt flattered at producing. "Moore vanished," continues Sydney, "and my vocation for authorship, as a means to relieve my father from his embarrassments, became a fixed idea, originating in the one strong instinct of my nature—family devotion—a very Irish one, and not the least creditable trait of Celtic idiosyncrasy. I think it was quickened into development by the success of Moore, the grocer's son of Little Longford Street."

Note that nasty little sneer at the poet's humble origin. With what grace it comes from the pen of the woman whose father was a down-at-heels, whisky-sodden actor, and her mother the daughter of a Shrewsbury tradesman!



At last Sydney Owenson took her courage in both hands, and made her first plunge into authorship. The story is so racily told in the last passages of her autobiography which she dictated, that I shall give it in her own words.

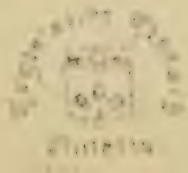
"I had observed that the Dominic Street cook was in the habit of hanging up her market bonnet and cloak in the back hall. I slipped down quietly one morning early, put on the cloak and bonnet, and with the MS. tidily put up under my arm, passed through the open hall-door at which the milkman was standing, and started on my first literary adventure.

"Arrived at a bookseller's shop in Henry Street, a small boy was sweeping down the steps, and in answer to my request to see 'the master,' inquired if I wanted the 'young masther or the ould one.'

"Before I could make my selection, a glass door at the back of the shop opened, and a flashy young yeoman in full uniform, his musket on his shoulder, and whistling the 'Irish Volunteers,' marched straight up to me. The impudent boy, winking his eye, said :

"'Here's a young Miss wants to see yez, Master James.'

"Master James marched up to me, chucked me under the chin, 'and filled me from the crown to the toe-top full of direst cruelty.' I could have murdered them both. All that was dignified in girlhood and author-



ship beat at my heart, when a voice from the parlour behind the shop came to my rescue by exclaiming :

“ ‘What are yeh doing there, Jim ? Why ain’t you off, sir ? for the Phaynix and the lawyers’ corps marched an hour ago.’

“ The next moment a good-humoured-looking, middle-aged man, but in a great passion, with his face half shaved, and a razor and shaving cloth in his hand, came forth and said :

“ ‘Off wid yeh now, sir, like a sky-rocket !’

“ Jim accordingly shouldered his musket ‘like a sky-rocket,’ and Scrub, leaping over the counter, seized his broom, and began to sweep diligently.

“ The old gentleman gave me a good-humoured glance, and saying : ‘Sit down honey, and I will be with you in a jiffey,’ returned in a few minutes with the other half of his face shaved, and wiping his hands with a towel took his place behind the counter, saying, ‘Now, honey, what can I do for you ?’ This was altogether so unlike my ideas of the Tonsons, the Dodsleys, and the great Miss Burney, that I was equally inclined to laugh and cry. So the old man repeated his question, ‘Well, what do you want, my dear ?’

“ I hesitated, and at last said : ‘I want to sell a book, please.’

“ ‘To sell a book, dear ? An ould one ?—for I sell new ones myself. And what is the name of it, and what is it about ?’

“I was now occupied in taking off the rose-coloured ribbon with which I had tied up my manuscript.

“‘What,’ he said, ‘it is a manuscript, is it?’

“‘The name, sir,’ I said, ‘is *St. Clair*.’

“‘Well now, my dear, I have nothing to do with Church books, neither sermons nor tracts; so you see I take it for granted it is a Papist book by the title.’

“‘No, sir, it is one of sentiment, after the manner of “Werter.”’

“He passed his hand over his face, which left the humorous smile on his face unconcealed.

“‘Well, my dear, I never heard of “Werter,” and I am not a publisher of novels at all.’

“At this announcement—hot, hungry, flurried, and mortified—I began to tie up my MS. In spite of myself, the tears came into my eyes, and poor good-natured Mr. Smith said: ‘Don’t cry, my dear, there’s money bid for you yet! But you’re very young to turn author; and what’s yer name, dear?’

“‘Owenson, sir,’ I said.

“‘Owenson?’ he repeated. ‘Are you anything to Mr. Owenson, of the Theatre Royal?’

“‘Yes, sir, I am his daughter.’

“‘His daughter? You amaze me!’ and, running round the counter with the greatest alacrity he said: ‘Come into the parlour and have some breakfast, and we will talk it over. Why, your father is the greatest friend I have in the world.’

“ ‘Oh no, sir, impossible ! I am expected to breakfast where I live—I must return.’

“ ‘Well, then, what *can* I do for you ? Will I recommend you to a publisher ?’

“ ‘Oh, sir, if you would be so good !’

“ ‘To be sure I would.’

“He then took a sheet of paper, wrote a few lines, rapidly tossed a wafer about in his mouth for some minutes, sealed his letter, and directed it to Mr. Brown, bookseller and publisher, Grafton Street.

“ ‘Now here, my dear ; Mr. Brown is the greatest publisher of novels and poems. ’Twas he that brought out Counsellor Curran’s poems, and Mr. O’Callaghan—beautiful poet, but rather improper. Now, dear, don’t lose a minute, this is just the time for catching old Brown ; and let me know your success, and what I can do for you.’ And so with curtsseys and blushes, and wiping away my tears, I started off for the other side of the water, and ran rather than walked to Mr. Brown’s of Grafton Street.

“A neat and rather elegant shop and a door with a bell in it, admitted me to the sanctum of Mr. Brown, the publisher. An old gentleman, in a full suit of brown and a little bob wig, looking over papers at the counter, answered my inquiry whether I could see Mr. Brown by saying :

“ ‘I am Mr. Brown.’

“I presented him the letter, and while he read it I cast my eye into the interior of the shop-parlour, where sat



an elderly lady making breakfast, and a gentleman reading beside her. My patron Smith's note seemed to puzzle him, and to *impatien*ter the old lady, who came forward and said :

“ ‘ Mr. Brown, your tea is as cold as ice ! ’ She looked at me earnestly, and then drawing Smith's note out of her husband's hand, said ‘ What is it ? ’

“ ‘ A young lady who wants me to publish her novel, which I can't do—my hands are full.’

“ I put my handkerchief to my eyes, and the old lady said, in a compassionate voice : ‘ Wait a little, perhaps Mr. J——. will look it over, and tell you what it is about ’ (that was the gentleman in the back parlour). Turning to me, she said : ‘ This gentleman, who is our reader, will give us his opinion of your book, my dear, and if you call here in a few days, I am sure Mr. Brown will be happy to assist you, if possible.’

“ I could just answer ‘ Thank you, madam,’ and depositing my MS. on the counter, I went out of the shop, getting back to Dominic Street in time to hang up the cook's bonnet and cloak in the back hall undetected, and to wash my hands and face and make my appearance at the breakfast-table, my absence being only noticed by Mr. Featherstone's remark :

“ ‘ You have been taking your early walk, Miss Owenson. I am glad you did not call on the girls to go with you, for the heat is very great.’

“The next day we departed for Bracklin, and I abjured as I then thought, for ever, authorship, its anxieties and disappointments. I heard nothing of my book : one reason, perhaps, was that I had left no address, though I did not think of it then.”

The sequel to the adventure was remarkable. On her return to Dublin some months later with the Featherstones, Sydney accompanied Mrs. Featherstone on a visit to an invalid lady. She was left alone in the drawing-room whilst Mrs. Featherstone was shown into the invalid's room. Seeing a book lying open on the window seat she took it up, and to her intense amazement found that it was her own novel, *St. Clair*, which had been published without her knowledge ! The publisher excused himself on the ground that she had not left her address, and he was therefore unable to communicate with her. But all the remuneration the authoress received was a present of four copies of her book !

Sydney Owenson's next venture in authorship was marked by even more romantic incidents than the first. To begin with, there was a love affair bound up with it. Amongst the letters which she scrupulously preserved was a packet thus endorsed in her own handwriting, which, by the way, was so illegible that a copyist was absolutely necessary to render the MS. fit for presentation to the publisher.

“Francis Crossley, aged eighteen, chose to fall in

love with me, Sydney Owenson, aged eighteen (?) He was then intended for a merchant, but the *Novice of St. Dominic* (which he copied out as regularly as written, in six huge volumes) and its author turned his head. He fled from his counting-house, went to *India*, and became a great man.”

Miss Jewsbury, to whom was entrusted the task of editing the autobiography and correspondence of her deceased friend, appends the following note to this endorsement: “Lady Morgan when she endorsed these papers had of course forgotten her own age. It is so sweet to be eighteen!”

It is a kind of forgetfulness not uncommon among her sex, but few have ever carried it to such a shameless extent as Sydney Owenson. She must have been at least five-and-twenty when she thus calmly registered herself as eighteen.

After leaving the Featherstones, and subsequently to the publication of her first novel, she had accepted the situation of governess in the family of Mr. Crawford of Fort William, in the north of Ireland, but quitted them some time in 1803, on finding that “the good folks were determined on going for life to *Castle-Tumble-Down*,” as she was pleased to christen their mansion. She joined her father and sister at Inniskillen, and there finished her novel *The Novice of St. Dominic*. When it was fairly copied out by the devoted Francis Crossley she determined to take it to London herself.

In those days, the journey was tedious, and somewhat hazardous for a young girl. There was the sea voyage, and the two days' coach drive afterwards, from Holyhead to London. Sydney had to travel alone, and she had very little money to help her on the way.

She used to say to her nieces, in after-life, that they—carefully nurtured girls as they were—knew little of the struggles and difficulties she had to encounter in her early days.

Her first journey to London was in curious contrast to the brilliant visits she subsequently made. When the coach drove into the yard of the "Swan with two Necks," in Lad Lane, she had not a notion where to go, or what to do next, and sat down upon her small trunk in the yard to wait until the bustle of arrival should have a little subsided. Overcome with fatigue and anxiety, she fell fast asleep. For a time no one remarked her—at last, a gentleman, Mr. Quentin Dick, who had been her fellow-passenger in the coach, saw her sitting there, and had the humanity to commend her to the care of the heads of the establishment, begging that they would take charge of her, and see that she was properly attended to.

The events which followed are thus described by Sydney herself:

"Without *one* friend to recommend, when I wished to publish *The Novice* I took in a newspaper for a



bookseller's name—I saw R. Phillips, and wrote to him." This was his answer :

"BRIDGE STREET,  
" April 6th, 1805.

"MADAM,

"I have read with peculiar pleasure your ingenious and ingenuous letter. It exactly portrays the ardour of mind and the frankness which always accompanies true genius.

"It *concerns* me that I am obliged to reduce to pounds, shillings, and pence, every proposition like yours—that all the speculations of genius, when they lie in my counting-house, become the subject of arithmetical calculation—that if, when tried by this unaccommodating standard, they do not promise to yield a certain rate per cent. profit, I am led to treat them with coldness and neglect, and am finally induced to reject them altogether as useless or visionary !

"And still I am often (UNDESERVEDLY) complimented as the most liberal of my trade ! as the most enterprising of all the midwives of the Muses !

"I am ashamed to say that the cold-hearted calculations which constantly absorb all my faculties in my own interested concerns, have prevented me from seeing or reading the little work of yours, of whose merit I entertain no doubt, since it is demonstrated arithmetically by the number that has been sold.

"I am, therefore, unable to write with precision,

being in the practice in all these matters of *judging for myself*; and although I repeat that I have been charmed with the ingeniousness of your letter, yet my prudence gets the better of my politeness, and commands me to see and read before I engage for your new work, unless I had previously been concerned in the sale of the old one, and was well acquainted with its merit and character.

“The Reviews I never read, nor would any person, were they acquainted with the corrupt views with which almost every one of them is conducted. If your work has received *their* praise without its being paid for, your merit must be great indeed, and I shall have reason to be proud of this intercourse.

“You can send the MS. through any friendly medium, addressed to me, to the care of Mr. Archer, Dublin, and you can desire him to forward it to me, or bring it with him in his projected journey to London.

“I assure you I am not used to write such long letters, but this has been extorted from me by the respect with which I feel myself your obliged,

“Humble servant,

“R. PHILLIPS.”

Those who remember the portrait which George Borrow has painted of Sir Richard Phillips in *Lavengro* will hardly recognise the grasping ogre of the “Newgate

Lives," in that letter, still less in the following in which Miss Owenson, after holding out for her own price for her novel, *The Wild Irish Girl*, finally brought Sir Richard to his knees. But then there is a difference between a charming young woman with a reputation already made, and an uncouth, impecunious young man utterly unknown to fame. This is how, two years after the publication of *The Novice of St. Dominic*, which was a success, the publisher addresses the authoress who had threatened to go elsewhere if he did not accede to her terms.

"BRIDGE STREET,  
"May 12th, 1806.

"DEAR, BEWITCHING, AND DELUDING SYREN,

"Not able to part from you, I have promised your noble and magnanimous friend, Atkinson, the three hundred pounds. His appeal was irresistible, and the *Wild Irish Girl* is mine, to do with her as I please!

"You were too rapid about the *Novice*. Had her sister gone to Johnson, he must have fathered the *Novice* also, and have answered your drafts in her favour.

"Write soon, and endeavour to make it up with me. It will be long before I shall forgive you! at least not till I have got back the three hundred pounds and another three hundred with it.

"If you know any poor bard—a real one, no pretender—I will give him a guinea a page for his

rhymes in the *Monthly Magazine*. I will also give for prose communications after the rate of six guineas per sheet. Your attention to this will oblige me, and may serve some worthy geniuses,

“Believe me always yours,

“Whether you are mine or not !

“R. PHILLIPS.”

*The Wild Irish Girl*, a fine, fresh, breezy book, full of humorous and pathetic pictures of Irish life and character, made Sydney Owenson famous. Her popularity in Dublin was immense, but it did not turn her head. She was so conscious of possessing gifts that rendered her immeasurably superior to the ordinary run of mortals that she accepted the homage paid her, as a queen that of her subjects, her rightful tribute, no more and no less. How various were her powers to please let her friend Miss Jewsbury tell :

“Endowed with faculties for social success—she sang well and played well, both on the piano and the harp—she danced like a fairy (an Irish fairy, be it understood), she was very graceful, and if the testimony of the many men who fell in love with her may be believed, she was beautiful. She could tell stories, especially Irish stories, with a spirit and drollery which was irresistible ; her gift of narrative was very great ; she possessed that rare quality in a woman—humour—and she was as witty as though *l'esprit de tous les Mortemarts* had inspired her. From



her most tender years she had been produced in society, and encouraged to produce herself; she had the power to amuse everybody. Full of Irish fun and Irish spirits, she was entirely bewitching. She enjoyed her own gifts, and her own evident delight in her powers was one great secret of her power of pleasing others.”

To say that Sydney Owenson was vain is merely to say that she was a woman, though I frankly admit the difficulty of deciding which sex can claim the honour of producing the finest and most egregious examples of vanity. Display was natural to her. She had no mystery, and she never felt the need of privacy or repose. Her activity both of mind and body was indefatigable. She loved flattery, it was a necessary of life to her gay, elastic nature, but she had a wonderfully shrewd appreciation of its actual value. She had higher aspirations than mere social success. Her highest aspiration was to make her native country better known, and to dissipate the political and religious prejudices that hindered its prosperity.

Of course Sydney had lovers. They had begun to pester her long before she was famous. Two young officers, who had first seen her in Kilkenny, Captain White Benson and Captain Earle, seem both to have paid their addresses to her at the same time. The two men were intimate friends and, so long as Earle was alive, White Benson apparently allowed him to make the running. But when Earle died

suddenly his friend pressed his own suit. Sydney does not appear to have had more than a friendly feeling for either. Amongst the letters she preserved (and she had a mania for keeping everything in the shape of a letter that had ever been addressed to her) there is one containing a passionate appeal from Captain White Benson. What her reply was no one knows, but it is a significant fact that a few weeks later the disconsolate lover drowned himself.

She used to say that she threw all her love-making into her novels and that this was the salvation of her. There was one man, however, who was received on a more favoured footing than the rest of her admirers, and that was Sir Charles Montague Ormsby, a King's Counsel, a baronet, and a Member of Parliament. He was a widower when he met Sydney Owenson and each was attracted to the other. There was a sort of informal engagement between them for several years, but his embarrassed affairs made marriage impossible—that is to say to Sydney, who had no mind to burden herself with a husband up to his eyes in debt, with a somewhat shady moral reputation and no particularly encouraging prospects. She kept all his letters, and they were found after her death neatly docketed with this label: "Sir Charles Montague Ormsby, one of the most brilliant wits, determined *roués*, agreeable persons, and ugliest men of his day."

Among the number of Sydney's early admirers was John Wilson Croker, and the story goes that he

proposed to her and that she snubbed him most emphatically. Hence, it is alleged, the vindictive feeling which he displayed towards her ever afterwards, a feeling which showed itself in the brutal attacks made upon her in the *Quarterly Review* under the guise of critiques of her books.

Croker was a man who seems to have had the peculiar gift of making himself generally detested. And, somehow, that is the feeling which he still inspires among most of those who know him only by his writings. But Mr. Louis Jennings has, I think, shown that Croker was really undeserving of much of the opprobrium which rests upon his name. He was, at any rate, most unfairly treated by Macaulay, and it is a fact that it was not he but Gifford, "the direst, darkest enemy I ever had," as Lady Morgan said on hearing of his death, who wrote the savage article in the *Quarterly* on Sydney Owenson's novels which roused her wrath and made her swear to be avenged.

She took her revenge characteristically. In her clever and racy novel, *Florence McCarthy*, she gibbeted Croker as Counsellor Conway Townsend Crawley, one of the best satirical portraits in English fiction, not even excepting Rigby in *Coningsby*, for which Croker also unconsciously sat. The whole description of the Crawley family is deliciously amusing, for the malice is subordinate to the humour.

Meanwhile Olivia, her father's darling, had found



it impossible to live any longer with her doting but dissipated parent, who was unable to provide her with the common necessities of life. She therefore took a situation as governess in the family of a General Brownrigg, where she met her fate.

"Olivia," says Miss Jewsbury, "had been but a short time in the family, when Dr. Clarke, physician to the Navy, and a man of high reputation in his profession, saw her, and became attached to her. Arthur Clarke was in those days one of the celebrities of Dublin. Small in height, careful in dress, a wit, a musician, a man of science, a lover of quips and anecdotes, a maker of pleasant verses, an excellent table-talker, a lion and lion-hunter, an adorer of learning and genius, and success ; such was the tiny, seductive, and most respectable gentleman who proposed to the charming sister of Sydney Owenson."

Dr. Clarke offered her a home for her father, and for old Molly, their faithful servant for so many years. These advantages were too substantial not to be thankfully accepted by the beautiful Olivia ; though, pleasant and agreeable as Dr. Clarke was, he was not exactly the man to captivate the fancy of a young girl or figure as a romantic lover.

They were married from General Brownrigg's house in December 1808, and they tried hard to persuade Sydney to come and live with them. But the "Wild Irish Girl" preferred her independence, though she, too, might have married well at this time had she

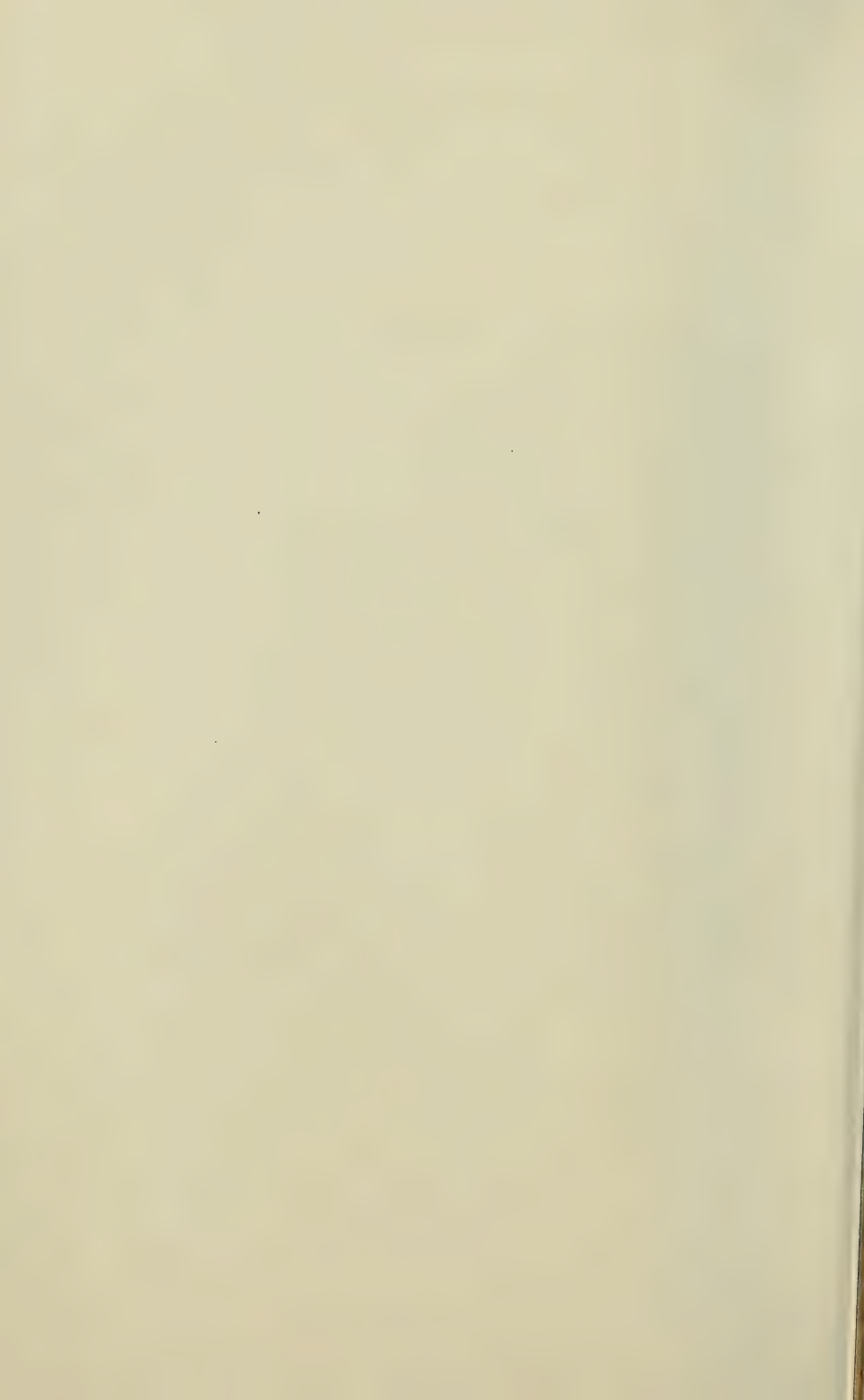




*From a miniature by Behnes in the possession of Mrs. Geale.*

LADY CLARKE.

(Olivia Owenson.)



chosen to do so, for she had had a very remarkable offer of marriage, so remarkable in fact that she had founded upon it her successful novel, *The Wild Irish Girl*. The story is as follows :

A young man, Richard Everard, had fallen violently in love with Miss Owenson ; his father discovered it, and was displeased. The son had no money, no profession, and was a very idle young man. Miss Owenson had no money either, and it looked a very undesirable match. Mr. Everard, the father, called upon Miss Owenson, stated his objections, and begged her to use her influence to make his son Richard take to some employment, and tried to obtain her promise not to marry him. Miss Owenson had not the least inclination to marry him, but nobody likes to be peremptorily desired to refrain from a course he or she is “not inclined to.” Still, Sydney Owenson spoke so wisely and conducted herself so pleasantly that the father actually became desirous of doing himself what he had forbidden his son to think of. Miss Owenson was no more disposed to marry the father than she had been to marry the son. He became, however, a very firm and kind friend to her father, assisting him both with counsel and money. Mr. Everard kept up a long and earnest correspondence with Miss Owenson, confiding to her, with singular frankness, all his own concerns and private affairs, and constantly entreating her to use her influence over his son to turn him from his evil courses.

The history of this curious friendship is detailed in Sydney's story of *The Wild Irish Girl*, where her father figures as the Prince of Innismore, Mr. Everard and his son as Lord M—— and Mortimer, though the delightful atmosphere of romance which clothes the episode in the novel was entirely absent from the real circumstances. The character of the Princess of Innismore was at once identified with the authoress, and until her marriage she was always known in Society by the sobriquet of "Glorvina."

But, in spite of her avowed resolution to be beholden to no one for her livelihood, Sydney was induced to sacrifice her independence. She accepted an invitation from the Marquis and Marchioness of Abercorn to enter their household as companion. It was an anomalous position—something akin to that of the household jester of the Middle Ages. The Marquis had been thrice married and once divorced. He and his third wife lived on terms of excessive politeness, and Miss Owenson was expected "to bear their tempers and attentions, to sit in the cross-fire of their humours, and to find good spirits and sprightly conversation when they were dull." The Marquis divided his time between Baron's Court in Ireland and Stanmore Priory in Hertfordshire.

Their mode of living was princely. At Stanmore a hundred and twenty persons slept beneath the roof, exclusive of under-servants. It was a palace; almost a village in itself. A royal chamberlain told Miss



Owenson that there was nothing like the entire establishment in England ; nor perhaps—for a subject—in Europe. “The sound of a commoner’s name,” she wrote to Miss Lefanu, “was refreshment to her organs, wearied out with the thrilling vibrations of ‘your Royal Highness,’ ‘your Grace,’ and ‘your Majesty.’ Amongst others, there was the exiled Majesty of Sweden, who candidly admitted that he was not fit to reign ; ‘that his people were the best judges, and were of his opinion.’” This Sydney declares to be a fact.

But there was all the pomp of royalty even when the family were by themselves. The Marquis was the type of a class now almost extinct—one of those fossil feudal lords, born with the conviction that the lower orders were of a different nature, and made of different stuff from himself. The groom of the chambers had orders to fumigate his lordship’s rooms after livery servants had been in them ; and the chambermaids were not allowed to touch his sacred bed except in white kid gloves. He never sat down to table except in his blue ribbon with the star and garter. “He was extremely handsome, noble and courtly in his manner, witty and sarcastic : a *roué* as regarded his principles towards women : a Tory in politics : fastidious, luxurious : refined in his habits, fascinating in his address : *blasé* upon pleasure and prosperity, yet capable of being amused by wit and interested by a new voice and face.” Altogether this “wicked

marquis " was about as dangerous a man for a brilliant young woman to be brought near as could easily have been found.

Why Sydney Owenson should have willingly subjected herself to this gilded slavery, so distasteful and humiliating to a woman of her high and independent spirit, is a mystery. There was no necessity for it. She had ample means of support from her pen, yet she voluntarily surrendered her independence, as though she were the veriest tuft-hunter that ever fawned at the feet of rank and wealth. Afterwards, of course, she said it was her destiny and that an irresistible power compelled her to accept the post, for it was her fate there to meet the man who was to be her husband.

The marquis had persuaded Dr. Thomas Charles Morgan to become his private and resident physician. Dr. Morgan was a widower, a man of some note in his profession, a personal friend of the great Jenner, handsome, witty, accomplished, with a private income of £300 a year. Miss Owenson, on her return to Barons Court after a long holiday, found this gentleman installed as a member of the Abercorn establishment.

Their first meeting was a curious one. Dr. Morgan had heard so much in praise of Miss Owenson's wit, genius, and general fascination, that he took an immense prejudice against her, and, being a very shy man, he disliked the idea of meeting her.

He was one morning sitting with the marchioness when the groom of the chambers, throwing open the door, announced “Miss Owenson,” who had just arrived. Dr. Morgan sprang from his seat, and, there being no other way of escape, leaped through the open window into the garden below ! This was too fair a challenge for Miss Owenson to refuse : she set to work to captivate him, and succeeded more effectually than she either desired or designed, for she dreamed of making a far more brilliant match. Dr. Morgan, however, was not long in overcoming his shyness, for, a week or two later, Sydney writes thus to her intimate friend Mrs. Lefanu :

“We have got a most desirable acquisition to our circle, in the family physician ; he is a person of extraordinary talent and extensive acquirements : a linguist, musician, poet, and philosopher, and withal a most amiable and benevolent person : he is in high popularity, and he and I are most amazing friends as you may suppose.”

Lady Abercorn, however, was determined that they should be more than friends. She had, indeed, from the first set her heart on making a match between them. According to Miss Jewsbury, her ladyship acquainted Sydney with her design, and “*Miss Owenson entered readily into the fun of such a suggestion !*”

Fun ! It was no fun to Dr. Morgan. He, poor man, was in deadly earnest. He was passionately in love with the “Wild Irish Girl,” and when he



proposed she was so taken aback by the ardour of his love-making that she accepted him. She wrote to her father asking his consent, and he wrote to Dr. Morgan such a letter as Captain Costigan in his cups might have written to "me dear Awthaw," when that enraptured swain formally proposed for the hand of the fair Fotheringay—a letter reeking of whisky and vulgarity—the letter of a blethering blackguard, with no sense of decency or delicacy, and I marvel that Miss Jewsbury and Mr. Hepworth Dixon, the joint editors of Lady Morgan's correspondence, should have allowed such a document to be published. It is only charitable to surmise that the man was drunk when he wrote it.

No sooner was the deed done than Sydney repented of it. She did not care for the man and she cared still less for the prospect of sacrificing her freedom. In a letter to Mrs. Lefanu, ever the confidante of her inmost feelings, she thus expressed the conflict of emotions raised by her rash engagement.

"The business was indeed so *hurried*, that it was all like a dream. The licence and the ring have been in the house these ten days—all the settlements made ; yet I have been battling off, from day to day, and hour to hour, and have only ten minutes back procured a little breathing time. The fact is, the struggle is almost too great for me—on one side, engaged beyond retrieval to a man who has frequently declared to my friends here that, if I break off, he will not survive



it! On the other, the dreadful certainty of being parted for ever from a country and friends I love and a family I adore, to which I am linked by such fatal ties, that my heart must break in breaking them.”

Then her sense of justice, which was keen, bade her say a word in his favour: “Barring his wild, unfounded love for me, the creature is perfection.” She contradicts herself, however, a little farther on, for she says: “His manners are too English to be popular with the Irish: and though he is reckoned handsome, it is not that style of thing which, if I were to choose for beauty, I should select—it is too indicative of goodness; a little *diablerie* would make me wildly in love with him.” She adds, “I gave a sort of consent to an event which it is, and has ever since been, my incessant struggle to delay.”

She succeeded in gaining a respite by petitioning for a fortnight’s visit to her father and sister in Dublin. Once there, she abandoned herself to gaiety, and tried to forget her engagement by flirting outrageously with a Mr. Parkhurst, one of the gayest men about town in Dublin. During her absence Dr. Morgan wrote her the most passionate love-letters. Never, surely, did a more ardent and extravagant passion inflame the heart of a grave and eminently proper physician. Here is a sample of the lovesick frenzy of his appeals to his inconstant and distracting mistress:

“O God! O God! my poor lacerated mind! but the horrid task is over, and now, dearest woman

(for such you are and ever will be to me), take me to you your own ardent lover ; let me throw myself on your bosom, and give vent to my burdened heart ; let me feel your gentle pressure, the warmth of your breath, and your still warmer tear on my cheek. Think, love, of those delicious moments ! when all created things, but our two selves, were forgotten ; of those instants wherein we lived eternities."

Miss Owenson did not respond to these raptures, and perhaps the memory of those " delicious moments " was the reverse of agreeable to her. At any rate, her replies were mostly cold and teasing. Rumours of her flirtations in Dublin reached the ears of the distracted lover and roused his indignation. " Do not think me cruel," he writes, " in reminding you that you have lost one husband by flirting, and that that makes *me* feel it is just possible you may drive another mad." The allusion is, I suppose, to Sir Charles Ormsby, between whom and Miss Owenson there had been constant quarrels on this point. To this letter and others like it the wayward Sydney returned soft answers, which caused her lover incontinently to forgive her and abase himself. Still she showed no signs of returning to Barons Court. The fortnight had lengthened itself into nearly *three months*, yet she made perpetual excuses for postponing her departure from dear delightful Dublin. At last the frantic lover wrote : "*If you really mean to marry me* your trifling with a passion like mine is

worse than cruelty. For God’s sake be candid and let me know the horrid truth at once.” Lord and Lady Abercorn, too, insisted upon her return unless she intended to break off the engagement. So she decided to go back and face her fate.

Any romance, however, which she may have felt about Charles Morgan was frightened out of her for the time being, and she said she would have given anything to be able to run away again. But she was not allowed the chance of changing her mind any more. On a cold morning in January, she was sitting in the library by the fire, in her morning wrapper, when Lady Abercorn opened the door, and said: “Glorvina, come upstairs directly and be married; there must be no more trifling!” Her ladyship took Miss Owenson’s arm and led her upstairs into her dressing-room, where a table had been arranged for the ceremony, behind which the family chaplain was standing in full canonicals, with his book open, whilst in front stood the bridegroom ready to receive her. There was no escape left. The ceremony proceeded, and the “Wild Irish Girl” was married past redemption.

Whilst the engagement was yet pending, the Lord Lieutenant had paid an opportune visit to Barons Court, and was easily persuaded to knight his host’s family physician—an event which materially aided in dissipating the remaining scruples of the “Wild Irish Girl,” who was then in her thirty-sixth or thirty-seventh year. She still, however, posed as a girl, and



her youthful look enabled her to maintain the deception. She admitted that she was two years older than her husband, and, as she was really only seven years his senior, I suppose that admission is as much as one has a right to expect from any lady.

The married couple still continued to reside under the roof of the Marquis of Abercorn, and Sydney thus describes the early days of their wedded life :

LADY MORGAN TO MRS. LEFANU.

"BARONS COURT, *February*, 1812.

"You who have followed me through the four acts of my comedy, seem to cut me dead at the fifth, and leave me to the enjoyment of my own catastrophe without sympathy or participation ; not a single couplet to celebrate the *grand event*, not even one line of prose to say 'I wish you joy.' It is quite clear that, like all heroines, I no longer interest when I gain a husband.

"Since you will not even ask how I am, I will volunteer the information of my being as happy as being 'loved up to my bent' (aye, and almost beyond it) can make me, and, indeed, so much is it true, 'the same to-day, to-morrow, and for ever,' that I can give you no other notion of my existence than that miraculous one of a man being desperately in love with his own wife, and she 'nothing loath.'

"Though living in a palace we have all the comfort and independence of home ; besides bedrooms and



dressing-rooms, Morgan's study has been fitted up with all the luxury of a *joli boudoir* by Lady Abercorn (who neither spared her taste nor purse on the occasion). It is stored with books, music, and everything that can contribute to our use and amusement. Here, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot,' we live all day, and do not join the family till dinner time, and as *chacun à son goût* is the order here, when we are weary of Argand lamps, and a gallery a hundred feet long in the evening—we retire to our snugery, where, very often, some of the others come to drink coffee with us. As to me, I am *every inch a wife*, and so ends that brilliant thing that was *Glorvina*.

"N.B.—I intend to write a book to explode the vulgar idea of matrimony being the tomb of love. Matrimony is the real thing, and all before but 'leather and prunella.' "

There can be no doubt that Lady Morgan's married life was a happy one. She learned to love the man who had wooed and won her in spite of herself. "Sir Charles," says Miss Jewsbury, "was a man of a sweet and noble nature, generous, high-minded, entirely free from all meanness and littleness, tender-hearted and affectionate, with a vehement and passionate temper."

That is, I fancy, rather an idealised portrait of Sir Charles, but he suited Lady Morgan, who not only loved him but respected him. Indeed, she was a bit afraid of that "vehement and passionate temper" of

his, and, perhaps, liked him all the better because he occasionally put his foot down and emphatically asserted his marital authority.

The "splendid slavery" of the Abercorn *ménage* was distasteful to both of them, and they made up their minds to shake off their gilded fetters. "Although our noble hosts," wrote Lady Morgan to Lady Stanley, "are everything that is kind and charming, we prefer a *home of our own*, be it ever so tiny. . . . I am at work again, but with the sole object of making some money to furnish a house in London, which, *coûte qui coûte*, we must have." The work to which she refers was *O'Donnel, a National Tale*, for which she received £550, and with that sum furnished a little house, not in London, but in Kildare Street, Dublin. Here, with the interest on the £5,000 which she had already saved at the time of her marriage, her husband's private income of £300 a year and her own earnings by her pen, the Morgans managed to live very comfortably.

Sir Charles had at first a considerable practice, too, as a physician, but the publication of his work on the *Outlines of the Physiology of Life*, in which he ventilated views which shocked the orthodox, brought down upon him a storm of censure, resulting in the loss of nearly all his patients.

The next important event in Lady Morgan's life was her journey through France with her husband in 1816, the issue of which was a book which, despite

ferocious reviews in *Blackwood* and *The Quarterly*, had a great sale and brought her in £1000.

Amongst the many notable persons to whom Lady Morgan was introduced in Paris was Madame de Genlis, whose impressions of “Glorvina” were not altogether favourable. “Lady Morgan,” she tells us, “is not beautiful, but there is something lively and agreeable in her whole person. She is very clever, and seems to have a good heart : it is a pity that for the sake of notoriety she should have the mania of meddling in politics.”

Madame de Genlis adds :

“Her vivacity and springing carriage seemed very strange in Parisian circles. She soon learned that good taste of itself condemns this kind of demeanour : in fact gesticulation and noisy manners have never been popular in France.”

Apropos of this passage, Abraham Hayward, the brilliant essayist, reviewer, raconteur, and whist-player, who knew Lady Morgan intimately and was one of her admirers, with limitations, adds : “Unluckily, she never did learn this. She erroneously fancied that she was expected to entertain the company, be it what it might ; and she was fond of telling stories in which she figured as the companion of the great, instead of confining herself to scenes of Irish low life which she described inimitably.” Lady Cork used to say : “I like Lady Morgan very much as an Irish black-guard, but I can’t endure her as an English fine lady.”

A similar tour was undertaken through Italy in 1817, but though she received £2000 for the record of her Italian impressions, which Byron pronounced to be a "fearless and excellent work" and which was undoubtedly superior to her "France," it met with nothing like the popularity of the latter.

On her return to Dublin Lady Morgan made "the little nutshell" in Kildare Street once more a centre of fashion.

Sir John Malcolm, with all his Persian honours thick upon him, visited Dublin in 1823, and, writing to his daughter, gives her the following account of an evening with the Morgans: "On Wednesday we had a very pleasant party at your uncle Charles's. Amongst others the famous Lady Morgan and her sister, Lady Clarke, who, without the pretensions of the authoress, is, I think, wittier and more agreeable. I was never so entertained as by this little shy-looking woman playing and singing her own funny songs. One, a parody of Miss Stephen's 'Home, Sweet Home,' made by Lady Clarke on Mr. Home, the celebrated pastry-cook of Dublin, was excellent.

No one makes pastry—makes pastry like Home.

She sang it delightfully, and was especially happy in the last verse, the last line of which (after all his pies and tarts were enumerated) states that

*All the sweets of the world are centred in Home.*



She had a thousand others of the same kind ; in one she most funnily describes her sister :

She is, though I say it, an elegant artist,  
A Radical slut and a great Buonapartist.”

The Earl of Albemarle, who first visited Dublin some two or three years later, thus records his impressions of the two sisters in his *Fifty Years of my Life*.

“A number of pleasant people used to assemble of an evening in what has been called ‘Lady Morgan’s snug little nutshell in Kildare Street.’ When I first made the acquaintance of the lady of the house, she was in the height of her popularity. I found her occupied in preparing for the Press her novel *The O’Briens and The O’Flahertys*. In this work, as she told me, I am made to figure as a certain Count—a great traveller—who made a trip to Jerusalem for the sole object of eating artichokes in their native country.”

“The chief attraction,” he adds, “in the Kildare Street ‘At Homes’ was Lady Morgan’s sister Olivia, wife of Sir A. Clarke. Her conversational powers were so greatly superior to those of her novel-writing sister that I cannot help suspecting that the work which went in the name of one was a joint production.

“Lady Clarke used to sing some charming Irish songs. They were for the most part squibs on the Dublin society of the day. A verse of one of

them, giving a sketch of the Irish metropolis of my day, runs somewhat thus :

We're swarming alive,  
Like bees in a hive  
With talent and janious, and beautiful ladies ;  
We've a Duke in Kildare,  
And a Donnybrook Fair,  
And if that wouldn't plaze yez, why nothing would plaze yez.  
We've poets in plenty,  
But not one in twenty  
Will stay in Ould Ireland to keep her from sinking ;  
They say they can't live,  
Where there's nothing to give.  
Och ! what business have poets with ating and dhrinking."

The authoress of *The Wild Irish Girl*, justly proud of her gifted sister Olivia, was in the habit of addressing every new-comer with, "I must make you acquainted with my Livy." She once used this form of words to a gentleman who had just been worsted in a fierce encounter of wits with the lady in question. "Yes, ma'am," was the reply, "I happen to know your Livy, and I would to Heaven your *Livy* was *Tacitus* !"

Olivia's husband had been knighted for curing the Duke of Richmond of a cutaneous disease, so that she was of equal rank with her sister. Between the two sisters there existed a deep and tender attachment, which lasted unbroken, even for a moment, from the cradle to the grave. Each was proud of the other and eager to make the world share in her pride.

Without doubt Olivia was the more beautiful, if not the more charming, of the two. Indeed, it is hard to say whether Sydney had any pretensions to beauty,

in the strict sense of the word. We have, unfortunately, no record from an outsider of her appearance when she was young. Henry Chorley, “that young man with red hair” whom Samuel Rogers detested, writing of Lady Morgan as he knew her when she must have been over sixty, says, “Anything but regularly pretty, she must at one time have been odd and piquant-looking.” Her portraits convey the idea of a plump woman of at least the average height, but she was the reverse of this—a tiny *petite* figure—not more, I should say, than four feet ten inches. In her later days constant playing on the harp had made one shoulder higher than the other, and she must have presented an odd appearance at the age of sixty “in a girlish white muslin dress with green sash,” as one who saw her at a reception at the Castle describes her. It was one of her weaknesses to imagine that she was gifted with perpetual girlhood, and to the end of her long life she affected a juvenility which made her often ridiculous. The most ill-natured portrait that has been left of her in her old age is, it is needless to say, from the pen of one of her own sex, who thus pictures her after she had passed her eightieth year: “A little, hump-backed woman absurdly attired, rouged and wigged; vivacious and somewhat silly; vain, gossipy and ostentatious; larding her talk with scraps of French, often questionable in their idiom, always dreadful in their accent; exhibiting her acquaintance with titled people so prodigally as to raise a smile.”

But, whatever she may have been in her old age, there can be no manner of doubt that Sydney Owenson in her younger days must have been a singularly charming and attractive woman.

Of Olivia's beauty there can be no question. She had, too, an inexhaustible fund of good spirits and real dramatic talent, which she imparted to her daughters, who frequently performed with great success in drawing-room operettas composed by their mother.

I can well understand that Olivia in her mature womanhood was more attractive to most people than Sydney, but the elder sister was indisputably by far the more gifted. She was, indeed, a woman of genius. Her novels are still delightful reading, and the humour with which she describes scenes of Irish life, and especially low life, is rich and racy of the soil. Her other works, too, whatever their faults, are admirably written. Thomas Cooper, the Chartist orator and poet, author of *The Purgatory of Suicides*, assured a friend of mine in my hearing that Lady Morgan's *Life of Salvator Rosa* was one of the most eloquent and striking books he had ever read, with a true insight into the art of that great but gloomy painter.

It was not till Lady Morgan was approaching her sixtieth year that she took her place in London society. In 1837 she and her husband left Ireland, and made their home in London at 11, William Street, Albert Gate. In the same year Lord Melbourne



granted her a pension from the Civil List of £300 a year, in consideration of her services to literature. Thenceforward the little house at Albert Gate was as attractive to Londoners as "the nutshell" in Kildare Street had been to Dubliners. "You have," wrote Abraham Hayward to her in 1856, "more strength and spirit, as well as more genius, than any of us. We must go back to the brilliant women of the eighteenth century, to find anything like a parallel for you and your soirées." Her little dinners frequently included the shining lights of the literary world, with a fair sprinkling of the stars of politics and fashion. But she was most delightful as a companion by her own fireside, with no one present before whom she was anxious to show off. Henry Chorley, then the foremost musical critic in England, says that "her familiar conversation was a series of brilliant, egotistic, shrewd, genial sallies. She could be caressing or impudent as suited the moment, the purpose in hand, or the person she was addressing."

Women as a rule did not like her, nor did she like women. "I do not like women," she once frankly confessed to Lady Stanley, "I cannot get on with them." Her hatred of Lady Blessington, for example, had no bounds. But she did not despise her sex as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu did, nor wish that she had been born a man. On the contrary, as she told Mrs. Lefanu in one of her letters, "the strongest point of my ambition is to be *every inch a woman*."

But meanwhile her life had been clouded by three great bereavements. In 1834 she lost her father, for whom, to the last, she entertained a romantic admiration and passionate affection, which were incomprehensible to those who knew his real character, but are not the less creditable to her heart. In 1843 her husband died after a very short illness, and for a time she was prostrated with grief. "Oh! my husband," she writes in her journal, and it is the only entry which appears for months, "I cannot endure this. I was quite unprepared for this. So ends my life." Four years later, in 1847, came the death of her "darling Livy," the greatest sorrow of her life. With all the worldliness of which her enemies accused her, Lady Morgan was a woman of strong affections, her love for her father and sister was tender and beautiful, and she was ever ready to make, and did make, large sacrifices for her family.

She was, in fact, of a most generous disposition, given to acts of impulsive kindness. One of the most curious and romantic incidents in her life was the strange appeal made to her by a perfect stranger, a man named Barnaby Fitzpatrick, who had been sentenced to death for a theft of bank-notes. Although he only knew her by repute, the condemned felon wrote to Lady Morgan, imploring her to interest herself in his behalf and procure a reprieve. The execution was to take place on the Tuesday: the appeal reached her on the previous Saturday. In that

brief space she interviewed the judge who had tried the prisoner, the foreman of the jury who had convicted him, and the Lord Lieutenant himself. Her eloquent and impassioned pleading for the condemned man, who, as she believed, was more sinned against than sinning, was successful, and Barnaby Fitzpatrick's capital sentence was commuted to transportation for life.

It was after the death of her husband and sister, that Lady Morgan became a celebrity in London society, and held those *soirées* in William Street to which I have referred. During the latter part of her life, her house derived at intervals a great additional charm from the presence of her nieces, the daughters of Lady Clarke, who, inheriting the gifts and graces of their charming mother, looked well, talked well, dressed well, and sang to admiration.

With unflagging vivacity, undimmed spirits, and undecayed powers, Lady Morgan reigned brilliantly over her little court till the Spring of 1859. On March 17th in that year she gave a musical party, which none who were present dreamed would be her last, for she was as gay and full of spirits as ever. But she caught a cold that evening from which she never recovered. Just a month later, on April 16th, she breathed her last. What her exact age was no one knew. But she could hardly have been *less than* eighty-three. In this matter of her age, indeed, as I have already shown, she was given to romanc-



ing, and spoke of herself as a girl when she was a middle-aged woman, well knowing that there were no registers of birth to give her the lie. As an instance of her inveterate love of romancing let me give the following anecdote. She once wrote to Lady Charleville from some town in Warwickshire to say, that she had settled down to finish one of her books in a charming country, in a delightful apartment opening on a pretty conservatory, with a velvet lawn before her door. Returning shortly afterwards from London to Dublin, Lady Charleville stopped at the place, hunted up the address, and found "Glorvina" in a poky little suburban lodging, looking on a cabbage garden!

Another weakness of hers, which I find it difficult to pardon, was her detestable habit of interlarding both her conversation and her writings with scraps of French. It is a habit of which some living writers, without her genius, are guilty, and it betrays a poverty of vocabulary and an ignorance of style, for which all true lovers of "the well of English undefyled" entertain a hearty and wholesome contempt.

Sydney Lady Morgan, as she liked to call herself, had these and other weaknesses which I have plainly portrayed. But for all that she was a charming creature—a brilliant, witty, vivacious, generous, impulsive Irish woman, whose healthy and intrepid scorn of conventionality, whose burning hatred of injustice and passionate sympathy with suffering redeemed her littlenesses and condoned her faults.



## CHAPTER XV

### “THE NIGHTINGALES OF BATH”

OF all the picture galleries I have ever visited, the one which has the most charm for me is that of Dulwich. I lived for some years within a stone's throw of it, and during that time I knew no greater pleasure than to saunter of a morning into this restful temple of art, and in delightful solitude study the works of the great Masters, enshrined amid such sympathetic surroundings. There are paintings there to appeal to all tastes, but none probably dwells longer in the memory of those who have only casually visited the gallery than Gainsborough's picture of Mrs. Sheridan and Mrs. Tickell, which hangs on the right-hand side of Sir Joshua's great portrait of Mrs. Siddons as the Muse of Tragedy, now, alas! rapidly losing all its colour. No one can look at the faces of the two sisters, as Gainsborough has limned them, without feeling attracted and interested. Those who knew the originals have declared that the artist has not done justice to the beauty of either sister, but no one can deny that he has invested both with a charm which fascinates the eye.

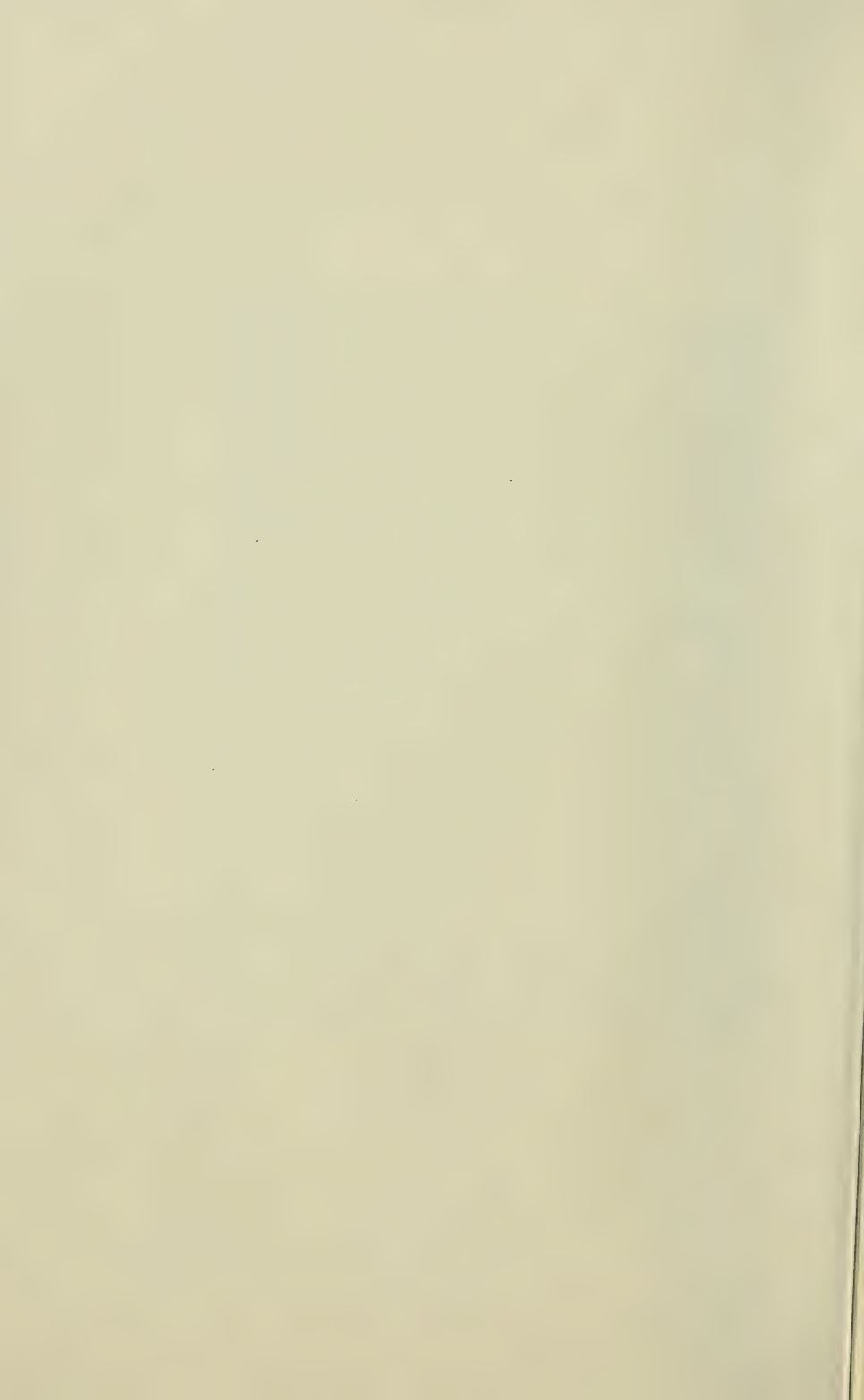
The two sisters were the daughters of Thomas Linley, a musical composer of some note, whose career was not without elements of romance. He was the son of a carpenter at Wells, and was apprenticed to his father's trade. Being sent on one occasion to do some work at Badminton, he took the opportunity to visit Bath Abbey Church. There he heard Thomas Chilcot play the organ. This and the singing of the choir awoke the music in him, which had as yet slumbered unsuspected. From that moment he determined to devote himself to musical study. Chilcot was his first master, and he completed his education under Paradisi at Naples. When he returned to England, he married and settled in Bath as a singing-master, in which capacity Dr. Burney says that, "he was unrivalled in England," whilst his admirable taste and simplicity as a composer have received enthusiastic praise.

But it was not until he began to give his regular series of concerts in the Bath Assembly Rooms, assisted by his children, that Thomas Linley became really famous. For the "Queen of the West" was then the most fashionable watering-place in England. Its Season was a red-letter date in society's calendar. Moreover, there was a refreshing freedom from conventionality about the place, the people, and the entertainments. Mrs. Grundy condescended to appear *en déshabille*, and things which would have shocked her sense of propriety in London, she regarded with toleration at Bath. Perhaps the nearest approach to the old gaieties of



*From a photograph by Eyre and Spottiswoode after the picture by Thomas Gainsborough, R.A., in the Dulwich Gallery.*

MRS. SHERIDAN AND MRS. TICKELL.





the western capital to be found nowadays is at Monte Carlo. For Bath was the happy hunting-ground of the gambler and adventuress, and all the disreputable mob of camp followers that hang upon the skirts of the great army of Wealth and Fashion. It was doubtless the consciousness that there was a smack of naughtiness in the air of Bath, which rendered it so popular with even the strait-laced and religious. For there virtue could rub shoulders with vice, and experience an agreeable titillation from the process, without in any way compromising its reputation.

Linley's concerts became the rage, and people raved about the beauty and talent of his daughters, especially the eldest, Elizabeth Ann, whom the Right Reverend Dr. O'Beirne, Bishop of Meath, enthusiastically declared to be “the link between an angel and a woman.” Nor was the bishop by any means more effusive in his praise than scores of other admirers. William Jackson of Exeter, the eminent composer and choir-master, whose pupil she was, said of her : “When she sang you might think you were looking into the face of an angel.” Dr. Charles Burney, author of the *History of Music*, and father of Fanny, the immortal, wrote thus of Miss Linley's singing : “The tone of her voice and expression were as enchanting as her countenance and conversation. With a mellifluous-toned voice, a perfect shake and intonation, she was possessed of the double power of delighting an audience equally in pathetic strains and

songs of brilliant execution, which is allowed to very few singers." Charles Dibdin, despairing of any attempt to describe adequately in words of his own her fascination as a singer, fell back upon Milton, and declared that she was, without exaggeration, one of those

Who, as they sung, would take the prison'd soul  
And lap it in Elysium.

Amateurs and professionals, critics and enthusiasts, alike agreed in pronouncing Miss Linley to be the most bewitching and fascinating singer of her day. When she sang in oratorio before the king and queen at Buckingham Palace in 1773, being then in her eighteenth year, good old George III., who fancied himself a judge of music, with tears in his eyes told her delighted father that "he never in his life heard so fine a voice as his daughter's, nor one so well instructed." Horace Walpole, with his usual spice of malice, says: "Miss Linley's beauty is in the superlative degree. The king admires and ogles her as much as he dares to do in so holy a place as an oratorio."

And indeed it was hard to say whether her face or her voice provoked the more admiration. The exquisite beauty of the one and the ravishing melody of the other charmed every one who saw and heard her. From the time she first appeared in public, as a mere child of twelve, till she grew into a lovely woman, she lived in an atmosphere of adulation.

The incense of flattery was ever in her nostrils, and yet she was unspoiled. Few men knew women better than John Wilkes, who, ugly as he was, used to boast that, give him a quarter of an hour's start with any woman and he'd cut out the handsomest man in Europe. And this is what John Wilkes wrote of Elizabeth Ann Linley to his daughter in a letter from Bath :

“I have passed an evening with Mr. Brereton's family and the Misses Linley. The elder I still think superior to all the handsome things I have heard of her. She does not seem in the least spoiled by the idle talk of our sex, and is the most modest, pleasing, and delicate flower I have seen for a long time : the younger a mere coquette, no sentiment.”

The younger sister here referred to was Mary, who subsequently became Mrs. Tickell. She, too, was a charming girl and an accomplished singer, but the splendour of her elder sister's gifts threw Mary's into the shade. That these were not inconsiderable, however, is proved by the success of her *début* at the Festival of the Three Choirs at Hereford in 1771 ; and when the two sisters appeared together at Gloucester the following year they created a *furor*. They were passionately attached to one another, and not even marriage and separation weakened their mutual affection.

There was yet a third sister, Maria, who is constantly confounded with Mary. She, too, was



highly gifted, and was a great favourite with Bath audiences. Until quite recently, it was accepted as a fact that she died on the public platform whilst in the act of singing "I know that my Redeemer liveth." And in an article in *Notes and Queries* on actors and singers who have died upon the stage her case is mentioned as one in point. But the story is absolutely false. Maria Linley died of brain fever, and there is just so much foundation for the legend of her death that she did, during her illness, not long before the end, after a severe paroxysm of pain, suddenly sit up in the bed and sing with wonderful force and exquisite feeling the words, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," from the last oratorio in which she had sung in public.

That so beautiful and charming a girl as Elizabeth Ann Linley should have been besieged by suitors was inevitable. Amongst these, whilst she was but seventeen, was a Mr. Long, the story of whose courtship is thus told by her daughter Elizabeth, afterwards Mrs. Henry Lefanu :

"At that period Miss Linley was addressed by Mr. Long, a gentleman of very large fortune and then sixty years of age. Her family considering this as a most splendid establishment, and Mr. Linley giving up all idea of the loss he must sustain from being deprived of the benefit of her professional talents, was urgent with her to accept Mr. Long's offer. Diamonds were presented, wedding clothes



prepared, settlements drawn up, etc., when suddenly the match was broke off.

“The blame fell on Mr. Long, and many persons actually dropt all intercourse with him in consequence of what appeared such ungenerous conduct to the young lady. Mr. Linley immediately declared his intention of prosecuting Mr. Long for breach of contract, on the ground of the loss he had sustained by Miss Linley being obliged to give up all her professional engagements during the time she received Mr. Long’s addresses. She, in the meantime, was sinking under severe indisposition brought on by anxiety for the steps her father was taking; as she feared, in the event of the matter coming to trial, that Mr. Long would give up a letter she had written to him declaring her reluctance to the proposed match on the ground of her attachment to another, and requesting he would withdraw his suit in order to shield her from her father’s displeasure; but she was relieved from this distress by Mr. Long voluntarily giving Mr. Linley three thousand pounds to be lodged in the hands of trustees for the use of his daughter, and who also insisted on her acceptance of jewels to the amount of a thousand pounds, and other valuable presents which had been sent to her at the time of the intended marriage. After this Miss Linley continued to follow her profession according to the engagements made by her father, to whom she was bound till the age of 21.”

This may be accepted as an authoritative statement,

and it certainly reflects more credit upon Mr. Long than upon Mr. Linley—the mercenary father who was quite ready to sacrifice his daughter's happiness by marrying her to a man old enough to be her grandfather, and for whom she entertained no kind of affection whatsoever.

It was just about this time that there arrived in Bath a family with whose destinies the Linleys were to be very closely associated. Thomas Sheridan, actor and elocutionist, one of those rolling-stones that gather no moss, after trying his hand at theatrical management in Dublin and London with no permanently satisfactory results, resolved to set up as a teacher of elocution at Bath. His father, the jolly, humorous divine, enjoyed the intimate friendship of Dean Swift, from whose gloomy mind his wit and jollity never failed to exorcise the dark spirit of evil. Careless of his fortunes, he bequeathed his son little but his happy-go-lucky theory of life—certainly nothing of his own lively and mercurial temperament. “Sherry,” said Doctor Johnson, of the son of the jovial cleric, “is dull, naturally dull : but it must have taken him a great deal of pains to become what we now see him. Such an excess of stupidity, sir, is not in nature.” But though his dulness no doubt militated against his success as an actor, it stood him in good stead as a teacher of elocution, for it was a pompous, decorous impressive dulness.

And the style of oratory in vogue in Thomas

Sheridan's day was of that stately and sonorous kind to which pomposity and “deportment,” in Mr. Turveydrop's sense of the word, were almost essential. Hence even Cabinet Ministers did not disdain to enrol themselves among “Sherry's” pupils.

Utilising the interest which he thus gained, Thomas Sheridan managed to procure for himself a Government pension of £200 a year. He sent his sons to Harrow, whilst he and his wife and daughter economised in France. On the death of his wife at Blois, Thomas Sheridan returned to England and settled at Bath. His family consisted of two sons, Charles Francis and Richard Brinsley, and a daughter, Elizabeth. The first persons with whom the Sheridans became intimate in Bath were the Linleys. Thomas Linley was in the habit of giving small musical parties at which he was assisted by his two charming daughters and his son Thomas, a highly gifted youth whose death by drowning at the age of two-and-twenty was a terrible blow to his father—“a nest of nightingales,” Dr. Burney calls them. It was at one of these parties that the two brothers Sheridan were introduced to the sisters Linley—the beautiful and “angelic” Elizabeth, then aged seventeen, and Mary, two years younger, who though, as I have said, dwarfed by her elder sister's superlative charms, was, nevertheless, a sweet and captivating singer, attractive in face and figure, and far more sprightly and coquettish than the “angel” of the family.



Both the brothers Sheridan fell in love with Elizabeth Linley at first sight, and made their sister, who had at once struck up a warm friendship with Miss Linley, their confidante and go-between. "On our first acquaintance," says Miss Linley, "both professed to love me, but I gave them no hope that I should ever look upon them in any other light than as the brothers of my friend—but yet I preferred the youngest, as by far the most agreeable in person, beloved by every one, and greatly respected by all the better sort of people." Richard Brinsley Sheridan was then seventeen, and his sister thus describes him, as she saw him when they met after her long absence in France :

"He was handsome, not merely to the eyes of a partial sister, but generally allowed to be so. His cheeks had the glow of health, his eyes—the finest in the world—the brilliancy of genius and were soft as a tender and affectionate heart could render them. The same playful fancy, the same sterling and innoxious wit that was shown afterwards in his writings, cheered and delighted the family circle. I admired—I almost adored him ! "

It was little wonder that the "angelic" Elizabeth, who was very human in her likes and dislikes, should prefer Richard to Charles. But the latter was the more deeply smitten of the two, in the first instance, at any rate. He was, however, but a half-hearted lover. Cautious, calculating, selfish, he



weighed the pros and cons, and decided that a penniless bride was no bride for him. He therefore withdrew from Bath, commissioning his sister to acquaint Miss Linley with the reasons for his departute, and bid her a formal farewell on his behalf.

Charles seems to have been deterred from prosecuting his suit by the dread of his father's displeasure. Thomas Sheridan's objection to a match between Miss Linley and his son would have had other grounds than the impecuniosity of the parties. The lady had already made herself a little too notorious by her affair with Mr. Long, on which Sam Foote, who revelled in bringing personalities upon the stage, had written a farce entitled the *Maid of Bath*, holding up the Linleys and Long to public ridicule. The beauty and musical talents of Elizabeth, the notorious stinginess of her mother, the mercenary matchmaking of her father, the love-lorn rhapsodies of the sexagenarian suitor, were all pressed into the author's service to raise a laugh. Miss Linley was at once identified with the *Maid of Bath*, and gained consequently a not very savoury publicity. Thomas Sheridan, proud, pompous and punctilious, would doubtless have found far more to object to in Miss Linley's notoriety than in her poverty. So Charles was wise in retiring from the lures of the enchantress.

But Richard, like Brer Fox, “lay low.” No one, except his sister, to whom he confided his passion, had any idea that he was seriously in love with

Elizabeth Linley. It was not in Richard Brinsley's nature to be frank and open, least of all in his love affairs. There was something underhand in the way in which he received the love-confidences both of his brother and his friend Halhed.

Nathaniel Brassey Halhed had been Richard's chum at Harrow, and the friendship between them continued after Halhed went up to Oxford. Whilst he was an undergraduate at Christ-Church, Miss Linley visited the University with her father, and sang in the Hall of Music, amongst other things, "by desire," a comic song of which a copy is preserved in the Bodleian Library. Halhed fell frantically in love with her, and begged his dear friend Sheridan, who had the inestimable privilege of living near the lovely Linley and seeing her daily, to further his suit with her. But such vicarious wooing, as Miles Standish found to his cost, seldom succeeds. That Sheridan, conscious of his own feelings towards Miss Linley, should have undertaken to carry out his friend's wishes does not speak well for his candour. Halhed seems to have had a suspicion at last that he had a rival in his friend, against whose superior advantages and opportunities it was useless to contend. He abandoned his suit of the "adorable" Elizabeth, accepted an appointment in India, went out broken-hearted to die there, and of course lived to marry another lady and look back upon his brief passion for the nightingale of Bath with complacency and amusement.

But Richard Brinsley, without pressing his own suit, posed as the beautiful Linley's friend and adviser, and waited craftily for his opportunity. At last it came, and he did not let it slip.

Amongst the early amatory indiscretions of Miss Linley was a clandestine affair with a certain Major Matthews, the finest whist-player in England. The Major was a rich man with large estates in Wales, where he also had a wife, whose existence he kept dark from his Bath acquaintances. When he came to that fashionable city, it was as a gay bachelor, and the moment he set eyes on the beautiful “angel” he became her passionate adorer. I think there can be no doubt that Elizabeth, if she did not encourage the major's attentions, at any rate did not repel them. She rather liked being made love to, and this gallant soldier had such a way with him that she half responded to his advances, till she found she had gone farther than she intended. When she tried to draw back, the major terrified her by swearing that he would shoot himself if she refused his addresses, and varied that threat with another even more alarming, for he vowed that he would ruin her reputation by making public her clandestine meetings and correspondence with him. Such, at any rate, was the story she told to her young friend, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, to whom she made it appear that Major Matthews was most cruelly persecuting her. No doubt the man had by this time



become a nuisance, and she felt it necessary to get rid of him somehow. But that she had been in the first instance an unwilling recipient of his addresses, I cannot believe in face of the admitted facts.

It is not clear to me whether Sheridan was on intimate terms with Major Matthews before Miss Linley gave him her confidence or not. Possibly he may have been, and that made the task of approaching the major easier. But at any rate, Richard Brinsley did worm himself into the friendship of Major Matthews (who could withstand that glozing tongue and those fascinating manners?) and persuaded the enamoured warrior that it was to his own interest to cease his attentions to the fair "Maid of Bath." Matthews was completely deceived by Sheridan's professions of friendship, never dreamt that his young friend had designs of his own upon the young lady, and was as astounded as every one else at the sequel. What that was I will let Richard's sister Elizabeth describe in her own way :

"Miss Linley, now completely disgusted with a profession she never liked, conceived the idea of retiring to a convent in France till she came of age, meaning to indemnify her father by giving up a part of the money settled upon her by Long. She advised with her young friend Sheridan on the subject, and he communicated the scheme to his elder sister, who, thinking it meritorious to assist a young person, situated



as Miss Linley was, in getting out of the difficulties that surrounded her, offered to give her letters of introduction to some ladies she had known in France, where she had resided some years, and Sheridan offered to be her conductor to St. Quentin, where these friends lived. The arranging the whole plan of course produced frequent meetings between the young couple, and though Sheridan was then strongly attached to Miss Linley, he claimed only the title of friend, and his sister had no idea that the projected excursion was to lead to an immediate marriage.

“At length they fixed on an evening when Mr. Linley, his eldest son, and Miss M(ary) Linley were engaged at the concert (Miss Linley being excused on the plea of illness) to set out on their journey. Sheridan brought a sedan chair to Mr. Linley’s house in the Crescent, in which he had Miss Linley conveyed to a postchaise that was waiting for them on the London road. A woman was in the chaise who had been hired to accompany them on this extraordinary elopement. They reached London early the next day, when Sheridan introduced Miss Linley to a friend and relation (Mr. Ewart) then in Town, as an heiress who had consented to be united to him in France. Another friend, the son of a respectable brandy-merchant in the city, suggested the idea of their sailing from the Port of London to Dunkirk, to which place his father had a vessel ready to sail immediately. This plan, as making pursuit more difficult, was immediately

adopted, and the old gentleman, not being entirely let into the secret, accompanied the young couple on board his ship, recommending them to the care of the captain, as if they had been his own children. He gave them letters of introduction to his correspondent at Dunkirk, and they were from thence given recommendations to several persons at Lille.

“After quitting Dunkirk, Mr. Sheridan was more explicit with Miss Linley as to his views in accompanying her to France. He told her that he could not be content to leave her in a convent unless she consented to a previous marriage, which all along had been the object of his hopes ; and she must be aware that, after the step she had taken, she could not appear in England but as his wife. Miss Linley, who really preferred him to any person, was not difficult to persuade, and at a village not far from Calais the marriage ceremony was performed by a priest who was known to be often employed on such occasions.”

It has been urged by Sheridan's friends that neither of the parties regarded the ceremony as more binding than a betrothal (it was never recognised by the parents of either as a legal marriage), and as a proof that Miss Linley approved of her lover's action, they appeal to her own words, written in a subsequent letter to him :

“You are sensible that when I left Bath I had not an idea of you but as a friend. It was not your person that gained my affection. No, it was that delicacy,

that tender interest which you seemed to take in my welfare, that were the motives which induced me to love you.”

But it seems to me that Sheridan's conduct was throughout this episode utterly unworthy of a gentleman and a man of honour. He lied all round to every one, and, on his own sister's showing, he entrapped the girl whom he was pretending so chivalrously to defend, who looked up to him as a Sir Galahad, into a position which he very well knew could only result in her being compelled to marry him or forfeit her reputation. That Miss Linley forgave him is nothing to the purpose. He had a tongue which no man or woman could resist, and when he pleaded with all the passionate eloquence of a lover, how could the poor, lonely girl, away from all friends in a land of strangers, do other than forgive him for the base trick he had played upon her?

But the strange thing was that when Mr. Linley hastened off to France and brought his daughter back, the gossips of Bath actually believed her assurance that she came back as innocent as she went, and her reputation stood proof even against such an escapade!

And how about Major Matthews? Sheridan had left behind a letter stating that he was playing the knight-errant with this forlorn lady to save her from the dishonourable advances of Major Matthews. The major, disgusted and enraged at the perfidy of his young friend, caused the following announcement to



be inserted in the *Bath Chronicle*, which is dated Wednesday, April 8th, 1772 :—"Mr. Richard S(heridan) having attempted, in a letter left behind him for that purpose, to account for his scandalous method of running away from this place, by insinuations derogating from my character and that of a young lady, innocent as far as relates to me, or my knowledge, since which he has neither taken any notice of letters, nor even informed his own family of the place where he has hid himself; I cannot longer think he deserves the treatment of a gentleman, than in this public method to post him as a L(iar), and a treacherous S(coundrel).

"And as I am convinced there have been many malevolent incendiaries concerned in the propagation of this infamous lie, if any of them, unprotected by *age, infirmities*, or profession, will dare to acknowledge the part they have acted, and affirm *to* what they have said *of* me, they may depend on receiving the proper reward of their villainy in the most public manner. The world will be candid enough to judge properly (I make no doubt) of any private abuse on this subject for the future; as nobody can defend himself from an accusation he is ignorant of.—THOMAS MATTHEWS."

Sheridan, of course, was compelled to take notice of this insult, and sent a challenge to Matthews. We have only Sheridan's account of the duel which ensued. According to that, Matthews was disarmed and forced to publish an apology in the *Bath Chronicle*.



Under what circumstances and conditions Matthews consented to publish this apology I have been unable to discover. But that Sheridan must have taken some unfair advantage of him is obvious from the fact that a few weeks later Matthews challenged him to a second encounter. Mr. Fraser Rae, who may (without offence, I hope) be regarded as holding a brief for Sheridan, on behalf of the family, gives the following description of the duel :

“The parties met on Claverton Down the following morning at so early an hour they had hardly light to see what they were engaged in. Sheridan rushed on Matthews with a view of disarming him as he had done before, but from the unevenness of the ground he fell and with a degree of violence that brought them both to the ground and broke both swords. In the struggle Matthews, who was many years older than Sheridan and much stronger, contrived to keep him under on the ground and with a piece of the broken sword stabbed him repeatedly in the body and in the face.

“Sheridan held up his right hand to defend himself, and also to show he was unarmed. His hand was dreadfully cut in this exertion. Matthews desired him to beg his life : he answered, ‘I will neither beg it nor receive it from such a villain.’

“Matthews then renewed his attack, and having picked up the point of one of the swords ran it through the side of the throat and pinned him to

the ground with it, exclaiming with an oath : 'I have done for him.' He then left the field accompanied by his second, and getting into a carriage with four horses which had been waiting for him, drove off.

"He had settled all his affairs so as to be ready for immediate flight in case of accidents. Sheridan's whole preparation was three letters, one to his father, one to Miss Linley, and one to his sisters. During the whole scene the seconds had taken no part. Mr. Sheridan's second (Mr. Paumier), a very young man and quite new to such affairs, said once to Mr. Barnard (Barnett ?) when he saw his friend hold up his hand, that they ought to be parted ; but Mr. B. answered they were both on the ground and the advantage equal. Paumier then entreated Sheridan would beg his life, and became so agitated as scarcely to know what he did.

"On Matthews quitting the ground the postillions raised Mr. Sheridan into the chaise and, putting his companion in with him, drove from the Downs to the White Hart in an almost incredible short time. Messieurs Ditcher and Sharp, the two most eminent surgeons of that time, were called in and after his wounds were dressed they would not allow of his being removed from the bed he was placed on. His sisters were informed of the business the following morning, and going to him they found his situation, from noise and heat, so very uncomfortable, they

obtained leave from the medical gentlemen to have him carefully removed to his own house.”

In justice to Matthews it must be remembered that this is his adversary’s version of what happened and should therefore be taken with the proverbial grain of salt.

Miss Linley was singing at Cambridge when the duel took place and the fact was kept secret from her ; for her father, ever mercenary and selfish, dreaded that the news of her lover’s dangerous wounds might so affect her that she would be unable to continue her engagements and he, consequently, would be seriously out of pocket. But when Elizabeth *did* learn all the risks her lover had run on her behalf, be sure it was a case of Othello and Desdemona over again :

She loved him for the dangers he had pass’d  
And he loved her that she did pity them.

But the parents on both sides were strongly opposed to the marriage. The young folk apparently acquiesced in the decision of their elders. Miss Linley devoted herself to her professional duties, and Sheridan betook himself to Waltham to study for the Bar. He had given his father a promise not to attempt to see Miss Linley or hold any communication with her. But everything is fair in love—even the breaking of promises—and Richard Brinsley, when he heard that his adored Elizabeth was engaged to sing in oratorios in London, resolved at all hazards to see her again.

Disguised as a hackney coachman, he drove Miss Linley home several times from the concert-room, but, as she was accompanied by either her father or a chaperone, he was unable to reveal himself. At last he had the joy of driving her home alone, and he lost no time in letting her know who her coachman was. Then came a series of clandestine meetings, a final appeal to the parents, who reluctantly withdrew their opposition, and the faithful lovers were wedded at last on April 13th, 1773.

Sheridan's father never forgave him for his marriage, which the proud old man regarded as a disgrace to the family; though in what respect a professional singer was inferior to the son of an actor it is not easy to see. From *his* parents, therefore, Richard Brinsley could look for no assistance, and, though he subsequently bled his wife's father to an extent that almost drained his resources, at the outset he and his beautiful wife set up housekeeping in their pretty, rose-covered cottage at East Burnham, with no other means than the interest of the £3000 settled upon Miss Linley by Mr. Long. It is true that Mrs. Sheridan had her profession to fall back upon, which would have brought her in an ample income, but, with characteristic contempt for money, Sheridan forbade his wife to sing in public after their marriage. What she might have earned by the exercise of her art may be gathered from the fact that in one season she was offered 1200 guineas for twelve nights at the Pantheon,



1000 guineas for Oratorio, and 1000 guineas for Giardini's Concerts—a total of £3360. Dr. Johnson approved of Sheridan's conduct in this respect.

“We talked,” says Boswell, “of a young gentleman's marriage with an eminent singer, and his determination that she should no longer sing in public, though his father was very earnest she should, because her talents would be liberally rewarded. It was questioned whether the young gentleman, who had not a shilling in the world, but was blest with very uncommon talents, was not foolishly delicate or foolishly proud, and his father truly rational without being mean. Johnson, with all the high spirit of a Roman senator, exclaimed: ‘He resolved wisely and nobly, to be sure. He is a brave man. Would not a gentleman be disgraced by having his wife singing publicly for hire? No, sir, there can be no doubt here.’”

Perhaps the old moralist was right, and one ought not to blame Sheridan for refusing to live upon his wife's professional earnings. But it detracts somewhat from the “high Roman spirit” of his resolve to know that he *did* condescend to live upon the slender private fortune of his wife and made no attempt to work for his livelihood. One can forgive the brilliant author of the *School for Scandal* many things, but how any honest and honourable man can forgive him for the shameless manner in which he sponged upon his father-in-law I am at a loss to understand. It was Mr. Linley who furnished for this poverty-stricken pair a house in

Portman Square, and there the improvident Richard at once plunged into a style of living which would have been extravagant if he had had an income of five thousand, instead of a hundred and fifty, pounds a year.

"His house was open," says one of his contemporaries, "for the reception of guests of quality attracted by his wit, the superior accomplishments of his wife, and the elegance of his entertainments. His dinners were upon the most expensive scale, his wines of the finest quality; while Mrs. Sheridan's *soirées* were remarkable not more for their brilliance than the gay groups of the most beautiful, accomplished, and titled lady visitants of the Court of St. James. Mrs. Sheridan's routs were the great attraction of the season. A friend—a warm and sincere friend—remonstrating with Sheridan on the instability of his means of supporting such a costly establishment, he tersely replied, 'My dear friend, it *is* my means.'"

But it is only fair to Mrs. Sheridan to say that this reckless extravagance of living had no charms for her. The little rose-covered cottage at East Burnham was her idea of happiness, and she often said afterwards that the year she passed there with her husband, living within their limited means, was the happiest time of her life: "Do let me have a little, quiet *home*, that I can enjoy with comfort," she writes to her husband in later years, and to the end of her life that was what she longed for, hating as she did the false glitter and

glare, and all the flashy splendour which her husband loved.

Up to this time, Richard Brinsley was simply known in society as Mrs. Sheridan's husband. Every one was eager to have *her* at their parties, but *he* was regarded as a nuisance to be tolerated for his wife's sake. The Duchess of Devonshire told Lady Cork that she was very anxious to have the beautiful and charming Mrs. Sheridan to sing at Devonshire House, but she didn't care to have “that stupid husband of hers!” In after-years Lady Cork reminded the duchess of this speech, when her Grace, after taking a most expensive house at Bath for the season, left it unoccupied for two months and gave as her reason for doing so the fact that day after day she and her party had been purposing to leave Chatsworth, but could not tear themselves away from the delightful and fascinating society of Mr. Sheridan!

But at last the time came when Sheridan “found himself” and, as the author of *The Rivals*, leapt at one bound into celebrity. And yet so little did his own and his wife's family realise what his abilities were that they at once rushed to the conclusion that the successful play was the work of Mrs. Sheridan, of whose talents they had a most exalted opinion. The epilogue, at any rate, they were certain, was hers, and would hardly believe her when she disclaimed the honour.

It was at this time that Sir Joshua Reynolds



painted his famous portrait of Mrs. Sheridan as St. Cecilia.

“Sir Joshua first,” says Mr. Phillips, in his *Life of Reynolds*, “met the handsome young people, as a married couple, at the musical parties given by a Mr. Coote, whose little daughters he afterwards introduced as angels attending St. Cecilia, in the famous picture upon which he was, in the beginning of 1775, at work. There was thus nothing forced in this, as in not a few of Sir Joshua’s ‘high-falutin’ personifications; the purity, the supremacy in song, the gentleness of Mrs. Sheridan, who had even previously been known as ‘the Saint,’ would suggest her naturally as the young Roman maiden. The master has depicted her seated at a harpsichord, clothed in a generalised costume—nearly a drapery—of warm white, of no especial fashion or period—well expressing either the saint or the woman. She sings, or is about to sing, and the angel children in attendance sing with her. The form is but vaguely expressed, the seated figure does not truly sit; but yet the rapt expression of the inspired young face, marred by no insipidity, or self-consciousness, the warm suffused glow of the almost monochromatic colour, are, even in the present injured state of the work, irresistible.”

This devotional picture of Mrs. Sheridan was to have its little history. It remained with Reynolds for over fifteen years, when Sheridan conceived a wish to possess it, and asked Reynolds to dispose of it to him.





*From a mezzotint by W. Dickinson, after the picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds.*

MRS. SHERIDAN AS ST. CECILIA.



The cordial answer he received was characteristic of that charming, graceful nature :

“DEAR SIR,

“I have, according to your orders, bespoke a very rich frame to be made for Mrs. Sheridan’s picture. You will easily believe I have often been solicited to part with that picture and to put a price on it ; but to these solicitations I have always turned my deafest ear, knowing that you would not give your consent, and without it I certainly never should part with it. I really value that picture at five hundred guineas. In the common course of business (exclusive of its being Mrs. Sheridan’s picture) the price of a whole length with the children would be three hundred. If, therefore, for the consideration of your exclusive right to the picture I charge one hundred and fifty guineas, I hope you will think me a reasonable man. It is with great regret that I part with the best picture I ever painted.”

This was true. It was certainly one of the most interesting and sympathetic of his greater works, a fit companion to “The Tragic Muse.” “He was always,” says Mr. Percy Fitzgerald, “thus inspired by women of genius, and added in return this tone of sympathy to his work.” The picture passed to Sheridan ; and once, in the thick of his embarrassments, he seems to have raised money on it. He then lent it to be exhibited, when, with other pictures, it was

seized by Burgess, his attorney, who, "had a lien on it." Sheridan was much distressed at this, and longed to have it back. He, therefore, *borrowed* £100 from Linley to release it (Moore hints that there was something not quite straight in this transaction), but it seems again to have fallen into Burgess's hands. After many vicissitudes, the picture has found a home at Bowood, Lord Lansdowne's historic seat in Wiltshire.

*The Rivals* was followed by still greater successes, *The Duenna*, *The School for Scandal*, and *The Critic*, each lifting its author a niche higher in renown. The joy and delight of his wife and her sister Mary in Sheridan's triumphs were boundless. It is pleasant to read their enthusiastic letters to one another on a subject so dear to both. For, next to his wife, Richard Brinsley had no warmer admirer than Mary Linley. "I, in particular," she writes to her sister, "am one who think you cannot be half kind enough to Sheridan."

In 1779, during the first flush of her husband's triumphs, we get a glimpse of her for a moment, just as she appeared to Fanny Burney, who, it would appear, had seen her once before.

"I was absolutely charmed at the sight of her," she writes. "I think her quite as beautiful as ever, and even more captivating; for she has now a look of ease and happiness that animates her whole face. Miss Linley was with her; she is very handsome, but nothing near her sister. The elegance of Mrs.



Sheridan's beauty is unequalled by any I ever saw, except Mrs. Crewe. I was pleased with her in all respects. She is much more lively and agreeable than I had any idea of finding her ; she was very gay and very unaffected, and totally free from airs of any kind. Miss Linley was very much out of spirits ; she did not speak three words the whole evening, and looked wholly unmoved at all that passed. Indeed, she appeared to be heavy and inanimate.

“Mr. Sheridan has a very fine figure, and a good, though I don't think a handsome, face. He is tall and very upright, and his appearance and address are at once manly and fashionable, without the smallest tincture of foppery or modish graces. In short, I like him vastly, and think him every way worthy his beautiful companion.

“And let me tell you, what I know will give you as much pleasure as it gave me—that, by all I could observe in the course of the evening, and we stayed very late, they are extremely happy in each other ; *he evidently adores her, and she as evidently idolises him.* The world has by no means done him justice.”

That Mrs. Sheridan idolised her husband there can be no doubt whatever. Let me quote one or two of her letters to him in proof of this.

“MY DEAREST LOVE,

“I shall call at the office (of the Theatre) for the chance of seeing you, though I am afraid

it will be in vain ; but I write again to beg you will come to us in the evening, for indeed, my dear Sheri, I am never so happy as when you partake my amusements and when I see you cheerful and contented with me. Your note had a tinge of melancholy in it that has vexed me, because I know my own heart and that it has not a thought or wish that would displease you, could you see it. I shall not, therefore, enjoy this party to-night unless you are of it. We shall not go from Mrs. Nugent's till half-past ten, I daresay. The girls are to come in the coach to me there by ten, to go with us, and I shall direct them to call at the House of Commons for you ; if it should be up before, leave word where you are to be, and they shall call for you anywhere else. I don't suppose it is necessary to be drest, but if the House sits late and you cannot come, at least send me one little line to make me happy for the rest of the night. If by accident the coach should miss you, Mrs. N. lives in Portman Square. God bless thee, my dear one ; believe that I love thee, and will love thee for ever."

And here is another letter, written to him when Mrs. Sheridan was probably visiting her sister at Hampton Court :

"MY DEAREST LOVE,

"Nothing can equal my disappointment on receiving your note. We expected you last night,

and sat up till two this morning, and waited dinner till five to-day. I wish, that, instead of Ned, you had sent the horses, that we might have come to you, for I almost despair of seeing you to-morrow at Heston. Do you *really* long to see me? And has nothing but business detained you from me? *Dear, dear* Sheri, don't be angry. I cannot love you and be perfectly satisfied at such a distance from you. I depended upon your coming to-night, and shall not recover my spirits till we meet. Pray send the horses to-night, that I may be able to set off early to-morrow. The weather has been so bad we have not been able to stir out of the house, so that you may suppose we have been comfortably dull, and this additional mortification has made both Mary (Mrs. Tickell) and myself so cross that I believe nobody would envy us our *tête-à-tête* to-night.

“I wish I could share your vexations with you, my poor love; but indeed I do so in imagination, though I am afraid that will not lighten your burdens. But don't fret, my dearest, for, let what will happen, we must be happy, if I can believe your constant assurances of affection. I could draw such a picture of happiness of you that it would almost make me wish the overthrow of all our present schemes of future affluence and grandeur.”

Of Mrs. Sheridan's devoted attachment to her  
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husband these letters I think afford conclusive proof. But was Sheridan's "adoration" of his wife equally sincere? Perhaps it was, but if so he had a very queer way of showing it. Mrs. Canning, who was an intimate friend of Mrs. Sheridan's, says that "he would tease and irritate Mrs. Sheridan till she was ready to dash her head against the wall." She would burst into tears and leave the room. Then he was filled with remorse. But "torturing her whilst he loved her all the while, and by worse and less lawful excesses and desertions, he at last destroyed her patience and alienated her heart."

He was furiously jealous of her and the sight of any man paying attention to her almost maddened him. In the following letter, with gentleness and dignity, she defends herself from his charges of levity.

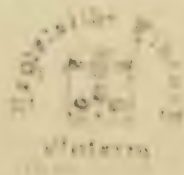
"MY DEAR DICK,

"Though I do not yet despair of seeing you to-night, I write for fear you should be unavoidably detained again, for I fretted very much last night that I had not done so, as I thought you would have liked to have received a 'fiff' from me this morning when it was too late to send you one. Your note from Sevenoaks found me alone in very bad spirits indeed. It comforted me a little; but I cannot be happy while you are otherwise, whatever you may think to the contrary. Whilst I live in the world and among people of the world, I own to



you I have not courage to act differently from them. I mean no harm. I do none. My vanity is flattered perhaps, by the attentions and preference which some men show towards me ; but that is all. They know I care for nothing but you, and that I laugh to scorn anything that looks like sentiment or love. I feel naturally inclined to prefer the society of those who I think are partial to me. Lord F. and H. Greville both appear to like me, that is to say as far as laughing and talking goes. As to anything serious, even if they were inclined to think of it, they know me too well to risk being turned into ridicule for the attempt. I never miss an opportunity of declaring my sentiments on the subject, and I am perfectly convinced they have no other views in seeking my society than that of amusing and being amused.”

“To say,” writes Moore, in a characteristic apology for his hero, “that, with all her beauty and talents, she was not happy, nor escaped the censure of the world, is but to assign to her that share of shadow, without which nothing bright ever existed on this earth. Not that she was at any time unwatched by Sheridan ; on the contrary, he followed her with a lover’s eyes throughout ; and it was believed of both, by those who knew them best, that, even when they seemed most attracted by other objects, they would willingly, had they consulted the real wishes of their hearts, have given up every one in the world for each



other. They had, immediately after their marriage, as we have seen, passed some little time in a cottage at East Burnham, and it was a period, of course, long remembered by them both for its happiness. I have been told by a friend of Sheridan, that he once overheard him exclaiming to himself, after looking for some moments at his wife, with a pang, no doubt, of self-reproach, 'Could anything bring back those first feelings?' then adding, with a melancholy sigh, 'Yes; perhaps the cottage at East Burnham might.'"

But Mr. Moore is not content with vague insinuations against the constancy of Mrs. Sheridan to her husband. He admits, indeed, that Sheridan, being the object of universal admiration, was a man "whose vanity and passion too often *led him to yield to the temptations by which he was surrounded,*" and that, therefore, it was but natural that his wife, "in the consciousness of her own power to charm, should be now and then piqued into retaliation and seem to listen with complacency to some of those numerous worshippers who crowd round *such beautiful and unguarded shrines.*"

Unguarded, indeed! Had he not just told us that she was not "at any time unwatched by Sheridan," who "followed her with a lover's eye throughout"? In his anxiety to prove his hero the most constant and devoted of husbands our good Mr. Moore is convicted of contradiction out of his own mouth.

For if his first statement be true, it is plain that the second must be false, and *vice versa*.

But, as I have said, not content with vague insinuation, Moore fastens upon Mrs. Sheridan a definite lover, in the person of Lord Edward Fitzgerald. “Lord Edward,” he says, “was the *only one* among the *numerous suitors* of Mrs. Sheridan to whom she was supposed to have *listened with anything like a return of feeling*: and that there should be mutual admiration between *two such noble specimens of human nature*, it is easy without injury to them to believe.” The italics are not mine but Moore’s and I fail to see how such an insinuation can be made “without injury” to either of the parties concerned. Here is the only incident, so far as I can discover, which Moore adduces in proof of this “return of feeling” on the part of Mrs. Sheridan.

“On one occasion, when Lord Edward was paying her a visit, Sheridan came in, and described a beautiful French girl he had lately seen, and added that she put him strongly in mind of what his own wife had been in the first bloom of her youth and beauty. On his leaving the room, Mrs. Sheridan turned to Lord Edward and said, with a melancholy smile: ‘I should like you when I am dead, to marry that girl.’”

“That girl” was Pamela, the illegitimate daughter of Madame de Genlis, whose name is romantically associated with the tragic fate of Lord Edward



Fitzgerald. For he did marry her, but there is no evidence to show that Mrs. Sheridan's wishes in any way influenced him in his choice of a wife. For my part, after the countless proofs of devotion to her husband which her life and letters afford, I refuse to believe that she ever entertained for any other man such a "return of feeling" as justified for a moment Sheridan's cruel and insane jealousy.

Sheridan could not complain that his wife was unsympathetic, for her pride in his triumphs and her faith in his powers were unbounded. She was, too, of invaluable assistance to him, both in the management of his theatrical affairs, when he became lessee of Drury Lane, and in the preparation of his speeches when he blossomed into a politician. It was she who spurred his sluggish temperament into action, and but for her his famous speech in the trial of Warren Hastings never would have been the success it was. Burke, seeing how indolent Sheridan was, implored Mrs. Sheridan to use her influence with him and induce him to lose no more time in getting his materials together. And she was successful. She did not spare herself. She worked like a slave for him, copying extracts from pamphlets, making, arranging and condensing notes, looking up authorities, for Sheridan confessed that he "knew nothing on any subject," and had to be "crammed" for every great speech he made. She was present in Westminster Hall and listened to that memorable oration, the most brilliant



and effective, if we may trust those who heard it, in the annals of British eloquence, though to those who read it now in cold blood it seems turgid and stagey to the last degree. What her feelings were over this triumph, which had raised her husband to fame and honour, may be gathered from the following letter, written in a tumult of joy, to her sister-in-law :

“It is impossible, my dear woman, to convey to you the delight, the astonishment, the adoration he has excited in the breasts of every class of people. Every party prejudice has been overcome by a display of genius, eloquence, and goodness, which no one with anything like a heart about them could have listened to without being the wiser and the better for the rest of their lives. What must *my* feelings be !—you can only imagine. To tell you the truth, it is with some difficulty I can ‘let down my mind,’ as Mr. Burke said afterwards, to talk or think on any other subject. But pleasure too exquisite becomes pain, and I am at this moment suffering for the delightful anxieties of last week.”

The year which brought Sheridan his greatest triumph brought his wife the greatest sorrow of her life—the death of her sister Mary, whom she loved with an exquisite tenderness and devotion.

After Mrs. Sheridan’s marriage and retirement from professional singing, Mary Linley took her sister’s place at her father’s concerts and in oratorio.

She was popular and successful, but never gained anything like the celebrity of Elizabeth. In 1780 she married Richard Tickell, grandson of Addison's friend, a pleasant, agreeable man, with some facility and humour as a writer, and superficially popular in society as a jovial companion and clever talker. He had a good post as Commissioner of Stamps, and supplemented his income by assisting Sheridan in getting up plays for Drury Lane. Mrs. Tickell, to judge from her fresh and breezy letters to her sister, with whom she corresponded daily, must have been both sensible and lively. Unlike Elizabeth, however, who retained her loveliness to the last, Mary soon developed into a matron, and her youthful beauty degenerated into mere commonplace comeliness. Even in Gainsborough's picture her face is attractive and sympathetic rather than beautiful. Touching that picture, here is her own account of its arrival. "When I came home last night," Mary writes to her sister in November 1785, "I found *our* picture come home from Gainsborough very much improved and freshened up. My father and mother are quite in raptures with it: indeed it is in *my* opinion the *best* and *handsomest* of *you* that I have seen."

The story of her closing years is succinctly and pathetically recorded by Mrs. Sheridan, on August 24th, 1791, in a paper enclosing the letters which she treasured almost as sacredly as she did her sister's three children:

“In February 1787 my dear sister came to town, in a bad state of health. On May 15th she returned to Hampton Court without having received any benefit from the various remedies prescribed for her. The three last letters were written between the 15th and 25th, when she was once more brought to town, dangerously ill of a fever, which afterwards turned to a hectic which never afterwards left her. On June 15th, she was carried back to Hampton Court, where I remained with her, and on the 19th we went by slow stages to Clifton Hill near the Hot Wells, with a faint hope that the air and waters might restore her; but, after struggling with this most dreadful of all diseases (consumption), and bearing with the gentlest patience and resignation the various pains and horrors which mark its fatal progress, on July 27th, she ceased to suffer, and I for ever lost the friend and companion of my youth, the beloved sister of my heart, whose loss can never be repaired, whose sweet and amiable qualities endeared her to all who were so happy as to know her. She died in the twenty-ninth year of her age, universally regretted and lamented, and was buried in the Cathedral at Wells, where she spent her infancy, and where she enjoyed happiness and poverty the first year of her marriage. In less than two years afterwards Mr. Tickell married again, a beautiful young woman of eighteen. The dear children remained with me till that time. The two boys were then taken home by



their father. The girl, the dying legacy of her ever dear and lamented mother, is still mine, and constitutes all my happiness."

The girl here mentioned, was afterwards the mother of John Arthur Roebuck, the once famous "Tear 'Em" of the House of Commons, and the fierce opponent of Trades Unions.

Apropos to Tickell's grief at his wife's death, he told Sheridan that he meant to have engraved upon her tomb the registration of his solemn purpose never to marry again. Sheridan persuaded him to wait a year; a wise delay, for by that time he had begun to think better of his vow to remain a widower. A popular and gifted poet, who died not very long since, erected a monument to his first wife in Hendon Churchyard, and in the first moments of bereavement rashly had carved under her name the words, "Here also lies her husband"; but he had over-estimated his own constancy to her memory and, on marrying a second time, had the words erased. The most devoted of husbands are not always inconsolable for the loss of their wives, as Sheridan was to prove equally with his brother-in-law.

Mrs. Sheridan's later years were embittered by the excesses of her husband, and she frequently took him to task for the "abominable habit of drinking to excess." He neglected her, too, for other women, notably the beautiful Mrs. Crewe, with whom his relations, though never, as I have shown, passing the bounds of



propriety, were more intimate than any wife could be expected to stand without remonstrance. And yet he loved his wife as passionately as it was in his nature to love any woman. When her health began to fail, his remorse for his past neglect was deep and bitter. To do him justice, his devotion to her during her last illness, though they kept from him the fact that there was no hope, was most touching and constant. Mrs. Stratford Canning, in her pathetic description of the last hours of her old friend, says: “It is impossible for any one to behave with greater tenderness and attention than he does. His whole time is devoted to her; he reads us a sermon every evening, and does everything in his power to soothe and comfort her, keeps up his spirits wonderfully before her, but when she goes to bed, then he is low and dejected. He does not say much, but grief is pictured in his countenance.”

On May 15th the doctor reported that Mrs. Sheridan's pulse was not above ninety: “This report elated poor Sheridan very much, who, being ignorant of the doctor's real opinion, lays a great stress on the abatement of the pulse. Mrs. Sheridan wrote a whole sheet of paper yesterday of directions, which she sealed up and gave to me, having written on the outside: ‘To be opened after my death, and to be considered as my last will.’ She gave it to me with great composure, and smiling said she hoped there would be no reason to open it, but as her disorder was of a very deceitful

nature, she thought it best to be prepared for whatever might happen. She read sometimes to herself, and after dinner sat down to the piano. She taught Betty (Tickell) a little while, and played several slow movements out of her own head, with her usual expression, but with a very trembling hand. . . . It was so like the last efforts of an expiring genius, and brought such a train of tender and melancholy ideas to my imagination that I thought my poor heart would have burst in the conflict. It did not strike Mr. S. in the same light ; he was pleased to see her able to amuse herself, and augured everything that was good from such favourable appearances. To me it seemed like the warnings of death and I thought, Perhaps this is the last time I shall hear that admirable creature play ! ”

The disease from which Mrs. Sheridan was suffering was rapid consumption, and a little more than a month after the scene described by Mrs. Canning, on June 28th, 1792, she died.

The day appointed for the funeral was Saturday, July 7th. Mrs. Stratford Canning sent the following detailed and pathetic account to her daughter :

“ The sad scene is closed at last, and I have seen my beloved friend laid in the dark and silent grave. Saturday was a day of sorrow, and of continual and painful agitation. We were dressed before six in the morning ; but did not leave the Wells till half-past seven. . . . At the end of two miles we stopped, and

spent five hours in a very uncomfortable inn, where we had nothing to divert our attention from the melancholy object in view. In the evening we again set forward, and about seven o'clock arrived within view of the Cathedral at Wells. We stopped about quarter of an hour in the road to adjust the ceremonials, and then proceeded in slow and solemn procession to the church, the whole scenery of which was to a great degree beautiful and affecting, and greatly heightened by the recollection of its being the spot where her early life was spent, and to which she was always particularly attached. The concourse of people whom curiosity and affection had brought together on the occasion was quite astonishing, and very much interrupted the luxury of our feelings. The choir chaunted the first part of the service, meeting the corpse at the entrance of the cathedral, and accompanying it along the great aisle.

“Mr. S(heridan) and his son walked first as chief mourners ; Mr. Linley and Ozias Linley next ; then Jane Linley and Mr. Richardson ; and last Mr. Leigh and myself, with poor little Betty (Tickell) between us. Faddy and Annette, with faithful George and Edwards, followed us. At the end of the aisle the coffin was set down and the Rev. Mr. Leigh read the psalms and lessons ; but the buzz and the tumult were so great that, although he exerted his voice to the utmost, we could hardly hear him. The coffin was then carried before us to the grave, with singing as before. I



thought I should have fainted with the heat and terror and agitation. The crowd pressed so at the grave that Mr. Leigh was afraid of being thrown into it. The remains were then let down into the last mansion, and the service concluded. Sheridan behaved with the most astonishing resolution ; at the last moment I perceived a wildness in his look which terrified me, but it soon passed away, and we retired from the sacred spot immediately."

Sheridan's emotional nature was stirred to its depths by this terrible bereavement. He moaned and sobbed half through the night for many days afterwards, and one cannot doubt that his grief was sincere. No human being ever had such an influence over him as "the angelic woman to whom he was united under such romantic circumstances, who shared his earliest trials, whose sweetness and beauty shed an additional grace on his subsequent triumphs and who, perhaps happily for herself, did not survive to witness the descending shadows which enveloped his later days."

It has been said, by no less an authority than Doctor Samuel Johnson, with how much truth I will not take upon myself to decide, that the highest tribute a man can pay to the memory of his dead wife is to provide himself, after a decent interval, with her successor. It is a proof that marriage has given him so much happiness, that in the "holy estate" alone can he hope to find a future of solace and



chastened joy. That touching tribute Sheridan did not fail to pay to the memory of Elizabeth Linley when, three years after her death, he married Miss Ogle, daughter of the Dean of Winchester, who survived him.

## CHAPTER XVI

### "THE THREE GRACES"

THE freaks of heredity are past accounting for ; like necessity, it seems to know no laws. Physiologists and psychologists, indeed, tell us that there are laws governing the transmission of hereditary qualities in human beings, but when they attempt to formulate those laws, they are at once confronted by a multitude of irreconcilable exceptions, which give the lie direct to their deductions. It would, however, have been safe, for even the least scientific of theorists on heredity, to predict that the son of Richard Brinsley and Elizabeth Sheridan was not likely to be a commonplace person. And, indeed, Tom Sheridan had many of the rare qualities both of his brilliant father and his beautiful mother. He was handsome, witty and fascinating ; he had a fine singing voice, he had an inexhaustible flow of sparkling talk, there was no better dancer in the three kingdoms, and, in whatever company he found himself, he was the king of good fellows.

Like his father, Tom married a charming and gifted woman, Caroline, the daughter of Colonel and Lady



*From a lithograph, after the painting by T. Gainsborough, R.A.*

MRS. SHERIDAN.

(Elizabeth Linley), afterwards the first wife of R. B. Sheridan.





Elizabeth Callender. He was then a dashing young cornet in a crack cavalry regiment, and was on the staff of Lord Moira at Edinburgh. Matthew Gregory Lewis, author of that gloomy novel *The Monk*, has left us this graphic picture of Tom Sheridan while he was spending a part of his honeymoon at Inverary Castle :

“I am very regular,” writes Mr. Lewis to his mother, “in my mode of life, compared to most of the other inhabitants of the castle ; for many of them do not go to bed till between six and seven ; and between four and five in the morning is the time generally selected as being most convenient for playing at billiards. The other morning I happened to wake about six o’clock, and hearing the billiard balls in motion, I put on my dressing-gown, and went into the gallery, from whence, looking down in the great hall, I descried Tom Sheridan and Mr. Chester (who had not been in bed all night) playing with great eagerness. Fortunately, Tom was in the act of making a stroke upon which the fate of the whole game depended, when I shouted to him over the balustrade, ‘Shame ! shame ! a married man !’ upon which he started back in a fright, missed his stroke, and lost the game.

“Mrs. T. Sheridan is also here at present, very pretty, very sensible, amiable, and gentle ; indeed, so gentle that Tom insists upon it that her extreme quietness and tranquillity is a defect in her character.

Above all, he accuses her of such an extreme apprehension of giving trouble (he says), it amounts to absolute affectation. He affirms that when the cook has forgotten her duty, and no dinner is prepared, Mrs. Sheridan says, 'Oh, pray don't get dinner for me, I'll take a dish of tea instead'; and he declares himself certain that, if she was to set her clothes on fire, she would step to the bell very quietly, and say to the servant, with great gentleness and composure, 'Pray, William, is there any water in the house?' 'No, madam, but I can soon get some.' 'Oh dear, no! it does not signify. I dare say the fire will go out of itself.'"

It was on the occasion of his marriage—an imprudent one, as the father thought—that Tom's well-known reply to the paternal threat that he would "cut him off with a shilling" was uttered. "You haven't got it about you, have you, sir?"

With such fatal gifts as he possessed it will be easily understood that Tom Sheridan soon found that he could not keep up the pace. He sold out of the army, and was for a short time assistant manager to his father at Drury Lane Theatre. Then he obtained an appointment of £1200 a year at the Cape of Good Hope, and took his wife and family out with him. Four years later he died there, and his widow returned to England with her two sons and three daughters, the eldest of them only ten. The Prince Regent granted her rooms at Hampton Court Palace, and

there she lived in seclusion until, in the interests of her daughters, she felt it necessary to take a small house in London.

There were many old friends of her husband's father who rallied round the widow of Tom Sheridan, when she set up her modest establishment in town. Mrs. Sheridan was still beautiful and charming, and might have been taken for the elder sister of her three lovely daughters—"The Three Graces," as they were at once christened by their admirers. Of these Helen Selina, afterwards Countess of Dufferin, was the eldest; next came Caroline Elizabeth Sarah, best known of them all as Mrs. Norton; and the youngest was Jane Georgiana, who, as Duchess of Somerset, won the highest matrimonial honours of the trio.

In after-years Helen thus described herself and her sisters to Disraeli: "You see, Georgy's the beauty and Carry's the wit, and I ought to be the good one, but I'm not." All of them, however, possessed the gift of beauty in an extraordinary degree. Fanny Kemble, in her *Record of a Girlhood*, gives this glowing account of the dazzling charms of the whole Sheridan family as she saw them at the Nortons' house when the girls were all grown up and married.

"I remember," she writes, "passing an evening with them there, when a host of distinguished public and literary men were crowded into their small drawing-room, which was literally resplendent with the light of Sheridan beauty, male and female: Mrs.

Sheridan (Miss Callender)—of whom, when she published a novel, the hero of which commits forgery, that wicked wit, Sydney Smith, said he knew she was a Callender, but did not know till then that she was a *Newgate Calendar*—the mother of the Graces, more beautiful than anybody but her daughters; Lady Grahame, their beautiful aunt; Mrs. Norton, Mrs. Blackwood (Lady Dufferin), Georgiana Sheridan (Duchess of Somerset, and Queen of Beauty by universal consent), and Charles Sheridan, their younger brother, a sort of younger brother of the Apollo Belvidere. Certainly I never saw such a bunch of beautiful creatures all growing on one stem. I remarked it to Mrs. Norton, who looked complacently round her tiny drawing-room and said: ‘Yes, we are rather good-looking people.’”

“The beauty of each of the sisters,” says the Marquis of Dufferin in his biographical sketch of his mother, “was of a different type, but they were all equally tall and stately. The Duchess of Somerset had large deep blue or violet eyes, black hair, black eyebrows and eyelashes, perfect features, and a complexion of lilies and roses—a kind of colouring seldom seen out of Ireland. Mrs. Norton, on the contrary, was a brunette, with dark burning eyes like her grandfather’s, a pure Greek profile, and a clear olive complexion. The brothers were all over six feet.

“My mother, though her features were less regular than those of her sisters, was equally lovely and



attractive. Her figure was divine—the perfection of grace and symmetry, her head being beautifully set upon her shoulders. Her hands and feet were very small, many sculptors having asked to model the former. She had a pure sweet voice, and sang delightfully.”

Helen was the first to marry. She was only seventeen when Commander Price Blackwood met her at a ball, fell in love with her at first sight, proposed, and was accepted. He was a very ordinary type of sailor-man—indifferently educated, not particularly good-looking, and the reverse of brilliant in every respect. But he just happened to be the first man who asked her to marry him, and she took him. His father, the Hon. Hans Blackwood, was heir to the title and estates of Baron Dufferin and Clandeboye, of which his elder brother James, who had no male issue, was then in possession, and Commander Blackwood, being the only surviving son of Hans, would eventually succeed to the title. In the meanwhile, however, he had nothing but his pay to live upon, and, as Helen Sheridan brought him no dowry but her beauty, his parents were strongly opposed to the match. But this did not deter the gallant sailor from marrying. Directly after the ceremony, at St. George's, Hanover Square, the young couple set off for Florence, where their only son, the late Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, was born on June 21st, 1826. Long afterwards, in 1890, Lord Dufferin visited Florence to revive old memories of his mother.

"I never dreamt," he says, "of being able to find lodgings which, more than sixty years before, an English naval officer and his wife had occupied for a short period ; but it so happened that Sir Dominic Colnaghi, our Consul-General at Florence, happened to mention my proximate arrival at a dinner he was giving, on which a lady said, 'Oh ! that is very interesting, for Lord Dufferin's parents lived in my father's house. I was then a slip of a girl about fourteen, and I shall never forget the impression made upon me by the angel of beauty and sweetness who came to stay with us. She took a great fancy to me ; used to tell me stories and sing to me, so that I perfectly adored her.'" This lady was Mrs. Magnay, a daughter of the house of Gigli, a distinguished Sienese family ; with her assistance Lord Dufferin was able to identify not only the house, but the actual rooms in which his parents had lived and he himself was born.

On another occasion, when Lord Dufferin was dining with Sir Dominic Colnaghi, he was informed that there was a lady in the room who had long wished to make his acquaintance. On being introduced, she said, 'Yes, Lord Dufferin, for many years I have wanted to know you ; indeed ever since when, at a play at Lord Normanby's, I was sitting behind a lovely young English lady, whose beauty and grace had quite fascinated me, and whom I took for a girl until I heard her consulting with a friend as to whether the baby's ribbons should

be pink or cherry-coloured. And *you* were the baby!’”

Two years later the Blackwoods returned to England and took a small cottage at Thames Ditton. Helen paid frequent visits to her sisters in London, where she met many of the celebrities of the day, the sisters Berry, Samuel Rogers, Henry Taylor, Brougham, John Gibson Lockhart, Sydney Smith, and Benjamin Disraeli. Of the last named the Marquis of Dufferin tells the following anecdote :

“The elder Mr. Disraeli being as yet more celebrated than his son, my mother had expressed a desire to see him. But the introduction could not be managed, inasmuch as at this particular moment Mr. Disraeli had quarrelled with his father. One fine morning, however, he arrived with his father in his right hand, so to speak, in Mrs. Norton’s drawing-room at Storey’s Gate. Setting him down on a chair, and looking at him as if he were some object of *vertu* of which he wanted to dispose, Mr. Disraeli turned round to my mother and said in his somewhat pompous voice, ‘Mrs. Blackwood, I have brought you my father. I have become reconciled to my father on two conditions ; the first was—that he should come and see *you* ; the second—that he should pay my debts.’”

Many years afterwards, when Mr. Disraeli had become Earl of Beaconsfield, he told Lord Ronald Gower that he considered Lady Dufferin the most beautiful and most charming of the three wonderful



sisters, and said that he had never seen any woman whom he admired more.

The opposition to the marriage on the part of her husband's family vanished from the moment Mrs. Blackwood was introduced to them. She captivated them all by her graciousness and beauty. Old Lord Dufferin, her husband's uncle, was particularly attached to her, and, till his death in 1836 at the age of eighty-one, he insisted upon her spending half her time, when the Commander was at sea, at Clandeboye House near Belfast, whilst the other half was spent with her mother at Hampton Court. Indeed, wherever Helen Blackwood went she won the hearts of men, women, children, horses, and dogs. For she seemed to have the power of compelling all living creatures to love her.

In November, 1839, her husband succeeded to the title which his father had only enjoyed for three years. But the son's tenure was destined to be even shorter. After unsuccessfully contesting an election at Chatham in 1841, Lord Dufferin started for Ireland. On arriving at Liverpool he went at once on board the steamer, and being exhausted with the fatigue and heat of the journey, and the worry of the election, he sent his servant to a chemist's on the quay to have a prescription for morphia pills made up. Time was short, the steamer's bell was ringing, and in his hurry and flurry the chemist mixed a dose of fatal strength. Lord Dufferin, all unwittingly, took the pills and before the ship reached Belfast he was dead.





*From an engraving.*

HELEN, MARCHIONESS OF DUFFERIN.



The shock of his sudden death prostrated Lady Dufferin, who was in delicate health at the time, and for a while her life was in serious danger. She recovered, however, but the doctors ordered her at once to the South of Europe. Accompanied by her sister, Lady Seymour, she travelled to Rome. There, in the following year, Mary Somerville, the most learned and scientific woman of her day, met the young and beautiful widow (she was only two-and-thirty), and has thus recorded her impressions in her “Personal Recollections” :

“There was much beauty at Rome at that time. No one who was there can have forgotten the beautiful, brilliant Sheridans. I recollect Lady Dufferin at the Easter ceremonies at St. Peter’s, in her widow’s cap, with a large black crape veil over it, creating quite a sensation. With her exquisite features and oval face, anything more lovely could not be conceived : and the Roman people crowded round her in undisguised admiration of ‘*La bella monaca Inglese.*’ Her charm of manner, and her brilliant conversation will never be forgotten by those who knew her.”

From that time Lady Dufferin devoted herself entirely to her son, whose education her husband had left solely in her hands. All the wealth of love in her large heart was lavished upon him and he repaid it with an affection as tender and beautiful as her own. I have never met anywhere with an instance so touching of perfect sympathy, trust, and friendship between

mother and son as that which existed between these two.

Happy he  
With such a mother ! faith in womankind  
Beats with his blood, and trust in all things high  
Comes easy to him.

Nor was the bond of union weakened even when her son took to himself a wife. For the mother's heart was big enough to embrace both, and her joy and delight in her grandchildren endeared her more than ever to their parents.

Amongst the many friends of Lady Dufferin were, as I have already stated, Mary and Agnes Berry, to whom she wrote the most delightful and entertaining letters. I cannot convey a better idea of her bright and lively wit than by quoting from a couple of letters to Mary Berry, in which she describes the proceedings that followed upon a burglary committed at her mother's apartments in Hampton Court Palace in October, 1846.

“Of course you have heard that we were robbed and murdered the other night by a soft-spoken cook, who headed a storming party of banditti through my mother's kitchen window ; if not, you will see the full, true, and dreadful particulars in the papers, as we are to be ‘had up’ at the Old Bailey on Monday next for the trial. We have seen a great deal of life, and learnt a great deal of the criminal law of England this week—knowledge cheaply purchased at the cost of all my wardrobe and all my mother's plate. We have gone



through two examinations in Court ; they were very agitating affairs, and I had to kiss either the Bible or the magistrate, I don't recollect which, but *it* smelt of thumbs. The magistrates seemed to take less interest in my clothes than in my mother's spoons—I suppose from some secret affinity of which they were conscious.

“I find that the idea of *personal property* is a fascinating illusion, for our goods belong, in fact, to our country and not to us ; and that the petticoats and stockings which I have fondly imagined *mine* are really the petticoats of Great Britain and Ireland. I am now and then indulged with a distant glimpse of my most necessary garments in the hands of various policemen ; but ‘in this stage of the proceedings,’ may do no more than wistfully recognise them. Even on such occasions, the words of justice are : ‘Policeman B25, produce *your* gowns.’ ‘Constable A36, indentify *your* lace.’ ‘Sergeant C—, tie up *your* stockings.’ All this is harrowing to the feelings, but one cannot have *everything* in this life ! We have obtained *justice*, and can easily wait for a change of linen. Hopes are held out to us that at some vague period in the lapse of time we may be allowed to *wear* out our raiment—at least, so much of it as may have resisted the wear and tear of the law ; and my poor mother looks confidently forward to being restored to the bosom of her silver tea-pot. But I don't know ! I begin to look upon all property with a philosophic eye, as unstable in its nature, and liable to all sorts of pawnbrokers. More-

over, the police and I have so long had my clothes in common, that I shall never feel at home in them again. To a virtuous mind, the idea that 'Inspector Dowsett' examined into all one's hooks and eyes, tapes and buttons, etc., etc., is inexpressibly painful. But I cannot pursue that view of the subject. Let me hope, dear Miss Berry, that you feel for us as we really deserve, and that you wish me well 'Thro' my clothes,' on Monday next. If I were sure you are at Richmond still, I might endeavour to return your kind visit; but at present our costumes are too light and our hearts too heavy for the empty forms of social intercourse."

The second letter contains the sequel to the police-court proceedings.

"As you guessed in your note, I was obliged to follow my *things* (as the maids always call their raiment) into the very jaws of the law! I think the 'Old Bailey' is a charming place. We were introduced to a live Lord Mayor, and I sat between two Sheriffs. The Common Serjeant talked to me familiarly, and I am not sure that the Governor of Newgate did not call me 'Nelly.' As for the Rev. Mr. Carver (the Ordinary), if the inherent vanity of my sex does not mislead me, I *think* I have made a deep impression there. Altogether, my Old Bailey recollections are of the most pleasing and gratifying nature. It is true I have only got back three pairs and a half of stockings, one gown and two shawls; but that is but a trifling consideration in the glorious institutions of our country. We were

treated with the greatest respect, and ham sandwiches; and two magistrates handed us down to the carriage. For my part, I could not think we were in the *criminal* court, as the law was so uncommonly *civil*.”

The most romantic episode in Lady Dufferin’s life was her marriage to Lord Gifford on his deathbed. It came about in this way. When Lord Gifford was travelling in Italy with a tutor, previously to matriculating at Cambridge, he fell in with Frank Sheridan, who introduced him to his niece, Lady Dufferin. Gifford was then a shy, nervous, melancholy lad, but Lady Dufferin’s bright and sympathetic companionship speedily dispelled both his shyness and his melancholy. He made her his confidante, and a warm and close friendship sprang up between the boy of seventeen and the woman of seven-and-thirty. Thanks largely to her influence, Lord Gifford’s career at Cambridge was a successful one. He possessed exceptional mathematical talents and had many accomplishments which made him popular when he left the University and took his place in the “Great World.” All this time his friendship with Lady Dufferin was maintained, till at last it terminated in marriage under strange circumstances.

Lord Gifford met with an accident while superintending the clearing away of some earth and stones that had accumulated round the base of the old Castle of Gifford. He was on the top of a wall, and



was giving directions to some men who were working with their pickaxes at its base, when he saw that one of the large stones with which it was coped was about to fall, with consequences which must be fatal, upon the people below. He, therefore, exerted all his strength to maintain it in its position until they should have time to escape. The effort was so great that he lacerated several internal muscles. At first he paid no attention to what he considered to be a mere strain, but as the pain grew daily worse and was accompanied with fever, he thought it better to come up to London.

Lord Dufferin and his mother were in Ireland at the time, and as Lord Gifford had made light of his injuries, they were surprised on their return to England a few weeks later to find him still suffering acutely. Lady Dufferin persuaded him to come to her house at Highgate, and there she nursed him with the tenderest solicitude. But it was all in vain. In the first week of October, 1862, there was a final consultation, and the doctors pronounced the case hopeless.

"On one or two occasions in happier days," writes Lord Dufferin, "when the flight of time had obliterated the disparity of years between himself and my mother, who maintained an extraordinarily youthful appearance, and changed the admiring boy of eighteen into the strong firm friend of thirty-five, Lord Gifford had asked my mother to marry



him ; but to these proposals she would never listen. When, however, on his deathbed, he repeated the same prayer, she could not refuse him this last satisfaction ; but, in justice to herself, to him, and to his parents, she thought it necessary to obtain from the doctors a formal assurance that his recovery was impossible. This being given without any hesitation, the marriage ceremony was performed in Lord Gifford's bedroom on October 13th, 1862, and immediately after they took the Sacrament together.”

In the letter which she at once wrote to Lord Gifford's father, the Marquis of Tweeddale, Lady Dufferin gave at great length her reasons for consenting to the marriage, which I have summarised in the following brief extracts :

“I believe you are aware of the strong attachment Gifford has borne me for more than twenty years, and no doubt you have understood and appreciated the reasons which have hitherto led me to consider a marriage between us utterly out of the question. . . . My views (or rather the circumstances) have changed ; his long sad illness, the constant alternations of hope and fear which I have gone through, above all, his angelic patience and cheerful courage, have inexpressibly endeared me to him, and, had God so willed, I would have gladly devoted the rest of my life to his happiness. This was not to be, but at least I can have the satisfaction of fulfilling his last wish. About seven months ago, when he was very

ill (though not hopelessly so) I gave him a half promise that if ever my son married, I would then consent to our union. This promise he has constantly adverted to with a degree of anxiety and earnestness that has had a deep effect on my mind, and the consideration that now no one's future interests or happiness can be influenced by the act, has brought me to the determination of complying with his request, made under circumstances that add an almost sacred character to his wishes. . . . We were married a few hours ago, in the presence of my brother and another witness. It has given ease and satisfaction to my dear Gifford's mind ; it gives me the right to devote every hour and day that God spares him to his comfort and relief, and (if my worst anticipations are realised) the right to mourn him openly, whose loss I shall never cease to deplore as the dearest and most faithful of friends."

A few weeks later, on December 14th, the romantic bond was severed, and Lord Gifford died, clasping the hand of the woman whom he had so strangely wooed and won.

In 1866 "Helen Gifford" received her sentence of death. The disease from which she suffered was cancer of the breast, and though she submitted to an operation, the agony of which she bore with heroic fortitude, she never for a moment believed that it would save her. The doctors expressed the most sanguine hopes of her recovery, but she felt

so certain that her summons had come that she left Ireland and came back to England to die.

It was soon evident that her foreboding was true. Slowly but surely her strength ebbed. Her son gives us a pathetic incident of her last days. His volume of Letters contributed to *The Times* had just come out, and was placed in her hands, “but by this time she was too weak to do more than read the title, and fondle the book a little as though she were stroking the head of a child.” On the morning of June 13th, 1867, she had a presentiment that her time had come. She called to her bedside her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren, kissed them all affectionately, and then cheerfully bade them “good-bye.” Before the evening came she was dead.

“Thus,” writes her sorrowing and devoted son, “there went out of the world one of the sweetest, most beautiful, most accomplished, wittiest, most loving and lovable human beings that ever walked upon the earth. Her wit, or rather her humour, her gaiety, her good taste, she may have owed to her Sheridan forefathers ; but her firm character and abiding sense of duty she derived from her mother, and her charm, grace, amiability, and loveliness, from her angelic ancestress, Miss Linley.”

Lady Dufferin wrote some sweet and simple lyrics which are not yet forgotten. I can remember the time when there were few songs more popular than “The Irish Emigrant.” I need only quote one verse

to bring back the memory of its touching melody to the middle-aged.

I'm sitting on the stile, Mary,  
Where we sat, side by side,  
That bright May morning long ago  
When first you were my bride.  
The corn was springing fresh and green,  
The lark sang loud and high,  
The red was on your lip, Mary,  
The love-light in your eye.

And surely in a book which deals with beautiful and charming women I may be forgiven for quoting Lady Dufferin's satiric picture of what *she* pretended to fancy men meant by a charming woman—though I protest it is a libel upon the tastes and predilections of my own sex in that direction.

Yes, indeed, she's a charming woman,  
And she reads both Latin and Greek,  
And I'm told that she solved a problem  
In Euclid before she could speak!  
Had she been but a daughter of mine  
I'd have taught her to hem and to sew,—  
But her mother (a charming woman)  
Couldn't think of such trifles, you know!

Oh, she's really a charming woman!  
But perhaps a little too thin;  
And no wonder such very late hours  
Should ruin her beautiful skin!  
And her shoulders are rather too bare,  
And her gown's nearly up to her knees,  
But I'm told that these charming women  
May dress themselves just as they please!

Yes, she's really a charming woman!  
But, I thought I observed, by the bye,  
A something—that's rather uncommon,—  
In the flash of that very bright eye;



It may be a mere fancy of mine,  
 Tho' her voice has a very sharp tone,—  
 But I'm told that these charming women  
 Are inclined to have wills of their own.

She sings like a bullfinch or linnet,  
 And she talks like an Archbishop, too ;  
 Can play you a rubber and win it,—  
 If she's got nothing better to do !  
 She can chatter of Poor-laws and Tithes,  
 And the value of labour and land,—  
 'Tis a pity when charming women  
 Talk of things which they don't understand !

I'm told that she hasn't a penny,  
 Yet her gowns would make Maradan stare ;  
 And I feel her bills must be many,—  
 But that's only her husband's affair !  
 Such husbands are very uncommon  
 So regardless of prudence and pelf,—  
 But they say such a charming woman  
 Is a fortune, you know, in herself !

She's brothers and sisters by dozens,  
 And all charming people, they say !  
 And several tall Irish cousins,  
 Whom she loves in a sisterly way.  
 Oh, young men, if you'd take my advice,  
 You would find it an excellent plan,—  
 Don't marry a charming woman,  
 If you are a sensible man !

Among Lady Dufferin's many accomplishments were numbered exceptional powers of elocution. "She was," says her son, "a wonderful reciter of poetry, especially of Shakespeare. As Mercutio, Benedick, Touchstone, and the Clowns, she was inimitable. But Falstaff was the part in which she excelled. To hear her on such occasions was to live with very

indifferent company in Eastcheap." That gift, at any rate, she owed to the Sheridan blood in her.

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Less happy was the life of the most brilliant and gifted of the three beautiful sisters, Caroline Elizabeth Sarah, best known to the world as Mrs. Caroline Norton, poetess and novelist, whose name obtained a painful publicity by her constant quarrels with her husband. Caroline was a year younger than Helen, and, though afterwards as beautiful as any of her sisters, was in her early girlhood so plain that her mother was quite concerned about her future prospects in life, and had a feeling almost of resentment that one of her children should belie the hereditary reputation of the Sheridans for beauty. But whatever the child may have lacked in good looks she made up for in brains. She began to write poems and tales before she had entered her teens, and the precocity of her literary faculty was proved by a remarkable satirical poem entitled "The Dandies' Rout," which she wrote when she was only thirteen.

I think that Mrs. Sheridan, owing to her scanty income, and the heavy expenses entailed upon her by bringing her daughters out, must have impressed upon them the urgent necessity of getting married as quickly as possible, for the girls certainly rushed into matrimony with unconscionable recklessness. Helen married Commander Blackwood simply because he was the first



*From an engraving by Thomson after a drawing by Hanter.*

MRS. NORTON.





man that proposed to her. And Caroline was equally hasty in accepting the proposal of the Hon. George Chapple Norton, brother of Fletcher Norton, third Lord Grantley. It is true that *he* afterwards stated that he had loved her passionately for *six years* before he ventured to address her as a suitor. But *she* as positively declared that he had never spoken six sentences to her before he proposed to her by letter. The two statements are not absolutely irreconcilable. Norton may have seen her when she was a girl of fifteen and fallen in love with her at first sight, but repressed his passion till she was old enough to appreciate it, or he was in a position to offer her his hand. I have little sympathy with Mr. Norton, but it must always be remembered that we have only his wife's version of the story of their married life, and a passionate, high-spirited woman, wrought up to a frenzy of indignation, is apt unconsciously to distort facts to suit her own views of justice.

How soon Mrs. Norton began to discover that she had made a terrible mistake in her marriage I do not know. But at first things went, to all appearances, smoothly enough between husband and wife, and their little house in George Street, Storey's Gate, became quite a fashionable rendezvous for celebrated wits and litterateurs. Lord Beaconsfield used in his later years to tell men of a younger generation how delightful were the dinners in old days at Mrs. Norton's, when the wit and humour flowed more copiously than the

claret. But it is from the pen of Fanny Kemble that we have the most glowing picture of these pleasant *réunions*. In her *Record of a Girlhood* she writes :

“When I first knew Caroline Sheridan, she had not long been married to the Hon. George Norton. She was splendidly handsome, of an un-English character of beauty, her rather large and heavy head and features recalling the grandest Grecian and Italian models, to the latter of whom her rich colouring and blue-black braids of hair gave her an additional resemblance. Though neither as perfectly lovely as the Duchess of Somerset, nor as perfectly charming as Lady Dufferin, she produced a far more striking impression than either of them, by the combination of poetic genius, with which she alone of the three was gifted, with the brilliant wit and power of repartee which they (especially Lady Dufferin) possessed in common with her, united to the exceptional beauty with which they were all three endowed. Mrs. Norton was extremely epigrammatic in her talk, and comically dramatic in her manner of narrating things. I do not know whether she had any theatrical talent, though she sang pathetic and humorous songs admirably, and I remember shaking in my shoes when, soon after I came out, she told me she envied me, and would give anything to try the stage herself. I thought as I looked at the wonderful, beautiful face, ‘Oh, if you should, what would become of *me*?’ She was no musician, but had a deep, sweet contralto voice,

precisely the same in which she always spoke, and which, combined with her always lowered eyelids (‘downy eyelids,’ with sweeping, silken fringes), gave such incomparably comic effect to her sharp retorts and ludicrous stories; and she sang with great effect her own and Lady Dufferin’s social satires, ‘Fanny Grey,’ and ‘Miss Myrtle,’ etc., and sentimental songs like ‘I would I were with thee,’ ‘I dreamt—’twas but a dream,’ etc., of which the words were her own, and the music, which only amounted to a few chords with the simplest modulations, her own also. I remember she used occasionally to convulse her friends *en petit comité* with a certain absurd song called ‘The Widow,’ to all intents and purposes a piece of broad comedy, the whole story of which (the wooing of a disconsolate widow by a rich lover, whom she first rejects, and then accepts) was comprised in a few words, rather spoken than sung, eked out by a ludicrous burthen of ‘rum-ti-iddy-iddy-iddy-ido,’ which, by dint of her countenance and voice, conveyed all the alternations of the widow’s first despair, her lover’s fiery declaration, her virtuous indignation and wrathful rejection of him, his cool acquiescence and intimation that his full purse assured him an easy acceptance in various other quarters, her rage and disappointment at his departure, and final relenting and consent on his return; all of which, with her ‘iddy-iddy-ido,’ she sang, or rather acted, with incomparable humour and effect. I admired her extremely.”



Amongst the many eminent men who knew Mrs. Norton and admired her in the early days of her married life was Macready, who more than once in his journal expresses the pleasure which her society gave him, and says, "I could not look at Mrs. Norton without looking long. Her face is one to think of." But an even more enthusiastic tribute to her charms was paid by Charles Austen, who, with the exception of Alfred Domett, was the most brilliant failure of his generation—a man who might have shone in politics and literature, yet was content to employ his great talents in money-grubbing at the Bar. "Mrs. Norton," he wrote, "was the most brilliant woman I ever met, and her brilliancy was like summer lightning, it dazzled but did not hurt." Whilst a far greater one than either, Percy Bysshe Shelley, said: "I never met a woman so perfectly charming, with so variable but always beautiful an expression."

But those delightful dinners at the little house in George Street were not to be kept up without considerable expenditure, and, as Mr. Norton was practically a briefless barrister, with only a small allowance from his brother, Mrs. Norton soon found that she must support the household by her pen. In 1829, within eighteen months of her marriage, she published *The Sorrows of Rosalie, a Tale, with other Poems*. It was extravagantly praised in *Blackwood's Magazine*, where, in the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, the Ettrick Shepherd, bursting into hysterical rhapsody, declares Mrs. Norton



to be the greatest poetess since "burning Sappho loved and sung."

Lockhart, in the *Quarterly Review*, described her as "the Byron of our modern poetesses." From that moment her literary fame was assured, and she was inundated with offers from publishers and editors. "The first expenses of my son's life were defrayed from that first creation of my brain," wrote Mrs. Norton, referring to the success of *The Sorrows of Rosalie*, and thenceforward she supported the entire household by the earnings of her pen. She was an indefatigable worker. She wrote tales and poems for weekly and monthly periodicals, she edited annuals and *Books of Beauty*—nothing came amiss to her, and from these sources her income amounted to £1400 a year. This was not excessive pay, if one considers how much more Lady Blessington received for her contributions to literature and journalism—trashy stuff for the most part, and not to be compared with the work of Caroline Norton. For Mrs. Norton never "scamped" her work, and never let her writing degenerate into slovenliness. She would polish an anonymous article for a daily paper as carefully as though it were to appear, with her name attached to it, in a leading magazine.

In her day she was the most popular of poetesses, and it seems strange nowadays to find Richard Hengist Horne, in *A New Spirit of the Age*, bracketing Caroline Norton and Elizabeth Barrett Browning as equals.

"Both," writes the author of *Orion*, no mean poet himself, "possess not only great mental energies, but that description of strength which springs from a fine nature and manifests itself in productions which evidently originated in genuine impulses of feeling. Both are excellent artists. Mrs. Norton's songs for music are very lovely, and have the qualities of sweetness and pathos to a touching and thrilling degree."

We have revised our literary judgments since then, and, whilst those who have ever read any of Caroline Norton's poems will allow that they are always graceful and fluent, often full of genuine pathos and eloquence, and sometimes inspired with passion, yet no one will admit that she can occupy any place that is not immeasurably below Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whom we have long since crowned as the Queen of English woman-poets. I had thought of giving, by way of contrast, a couple of stanzas from Mrs. Norton's, "A Voice from the Factories," and a couple from Mrs. Browning's, "Cry of the Children," to show with what a different measure of poetic passion the two women treat the same subject. But the comparison would be cruel to Mrs. Norton, and I forbear. Mrs. Norton, however, was unsurpassed by any woman of her time as a writer of eloquent and vigorous prose. Her pamphlets are admirably written and, by way of specimen, I will give this brief extract from the dedication to Lord Ashley, afterwards Earl of Shaftes-

bury, which forms the preface to her poem, “A Voice from the Factories.”

“I earnestly hope I shall live to see this evil abolished. There will be delay—there will be opposition : such has ever been the case with all questions involving conflicting interests, and more especially when the preponderating interest has been on the side of the existing abuse. Yet, as the noble-hearted and compassionate Howard became immortally connected with the removal of abuses which for centuries disgraced our prison discipline ; as the perseverance of Wilberforce created the dawn of the long-delayed emancipation of the negroes ; so, my lord, I trust to see *your* name enrolled with the names of these great and good men, as the Liberator and Defender of those helpless beings, on whom are inflicted many of the evils both of slavery and imprisonment, without the odium of either.”

No one can deny that this is good writing, and it was as a writer of such idiomatic prose that Caroline Norton excelled.

Meanwhile her married life had been a most miserable one. Not content with living on her literary earnings, her husband pestered her to use her influence with her political friends to procure him an appointment. In an evil hour for her peace she applied to Lord Melbourne.

“He had not been long at the Home Office,” says Mr. Torrens, in his *Life of Lord Melbourne*, “when he



received a letter from the granddaughter of Sheridan, who was a near relation to Sir James Graham, asking for her husband, Mr. Norton, some appointment for which he might be considered eligible as a member of the Bar, and gently pleading, as a claim to consideration, the illustrious memory of him who had once been the idol of the Whigs, but who had unrequited passed away while yet they tarried in the wilderness."

Lord Melbourne answered the letter in person, as he was passing Storey's Gate on his way to the House of Lords, and informed Mrs. Norton that there was a police magistracy vacant to which he should have much pleasure in appointing Mr. Norton. And so the Hon. George Chapple Norton became one of the Marylebone Police magistrates. He proved himself, however, so little qualified for the post, not only from his incapacity, but from his unpunctuality, that complaints were constantly being made, and Lord Melbourne was severely censured in the newspapers for appointing such an incompetent person to so important a post. Lord Melbourne, who was by this time on the footing of an old friend with Mrs. Norton and a constant visitor at her house, wrote to her privately, asking her to give her husband a hint to reform his ways. The result of Mrs. Norton's remonstrance, which was perhaps not very tactfully worded, for she had a bitter and stinging tongue, was a violent quarrel between her and her husband, which ended in a temporary separation. Then Lord Melbourne showed



himself in the guise of an adviser and conciliator. "A woman," he wrote to Mrs. Norton, "should never part from her husband whilst she can remain with him. If this is generally the case, it is particularly so in such a case as yours: that is, the case of a young, handsome woman of lively imagination, fond of company and conversation, and whose celebrity and superiority have necessarily created many enemies. . . . If, for the sake of your children, you can endure to return to him, you will certainly act more wisely and prudently for yourself in doing so."

Excellent advice, no doubt, from a man of five-and-fifty to a woman of six-and-twenty, but, unfortunately, the adviser had a reputation for compromising relations with young and handsome women, and was not exactly the sort of person whom any husband, with the slightest self-respect, would tolerate as his wife's confidential counsellor. Mr. Norton's suspicions had been already roused by the promptitude with which Lord Melbourne had acceded to his wife's request for an appointment for her husband. The constant visits of the Premier to his house still further excited his jealousy, and he resolved to have a deadly revenge on both his wife and Lord Melbourne. In the spring of 1836 there fell like a bombshell in society the announcement that Mr. Norton had commenced an action against Lord Melbourne for "criminal conversation" with Mrs. Norton. The Whigs at once saw in this projected suit a Tory plot to ruin

the Melbourne Administration, and there were many then who firmly believed that Norton was but a tool in the hands of the Premier's unscrupulous political enemies. Be this as it may, the interest taken in the case was extraordinary. Nothing since the trial of Queen Caroline had excited such sensation. Couriers were specially engaged to carry the news of the verdict to foreign Courts at express speed, for the fate of a Ministry hung upon the result.

In this terrible crisis I think Melbourne bore himself well. Though he knew his own personal and political reputation to be at stake, it was less of himself that he thought than of the woman whose name had been so foully and cruelly linked with his own. It was thus that he wrote to Mrs. Norton :

"I hope you will not take it ill if I implore you to try at least to be calm under these trials. You know that what is alleged (if it be alleged) is utterly false, and what is false can rarely be made to appear true. The steps which it will be prudent to take, it will be impossible to determine until we know more certainly the course that is intended to be pursued."

But the calm he preached he was himself not able to practise. The subject became more and more every day the engrossing theme of conversation in society and of comment in the Press. Sensitive at all times to imputations by which others were likely to be affected through him, he could not be unconscious that the fortunes of his friends and adherents were

inextricably involved in the issue that was depending. By the law, as it then stood, no personal testimony by him was admissible ; and it was vain to surmise what might be asserted regarding trivial or forgotten details of intimacy stretching over a period of more than five years. Vexation and anxiety at length completely overpowered his physical strength, and for some weeks he was seriously unwell. On the 9th of June he wrote to Mrs. Norton :

“ Since I have first heard that I was to be proceeded against, I have suffered more intensely than ever I did in my life. I have had neither sleep nor appetite, and I attribute the whole of my illness (at least, the severity of it) to the uneasiness of my mind. Now what is this uneasiness for ? Not for my own character, because, as you justly say, the imputation on me is as nothing. It is not for the political consequences to myself, although I deeply feel the consequences which my indiscretion may bring upon those who are attached to me, and who follow my fortunes. The real and principal object of my anxiety and solicitude is *you*, and the situation in which you have been so unjustly placed, by the circumstances which have taken place.”

Mrs. Norton, too, bore herself as a brave and proud woman, conscious of her innocence, should do. There were faithful friends of her own sex, like the Duchess of Sutherland, whose sympathy she has acknowledged in the most beautiful and touching



verses that ever came from her pen, who stood by her and helped her to face the coldness and scorn of the "Society women" who, jealous of her beauty and her fame, rejoiced in the prospect of her fall.

Thou, then, when cowards lied away my name,  
 And scoffed to see me feebly stem the tide ;  
 When some were kind on whom I had no claim,  
 And some forsook on whom my love relied,  
 And some, who might have battled for my sake,  
 Stood off in doubt, to see what turn the world would take—

Thou gav'st me that the poor do give the poor,  
 Kind words, and holy wishes, and true tears ;  
 The loved, and near of kin, could do no more,  
 Who changed not with the gloom of varying years,  
 But clung the closer when I stood forlorn,  
 And blunted Slander's dart with their indignant scorn.

All readers of George Meredith's *Diana of the Cross-ways* will remember with what wonderful power and subtle analysis of character he has depicted the mental anguish which Mrs. Norton must have undergone at this terrible time.

It was on June 22nd, 1836, that the great case came on for trial in the Court of Common Pleas at Westminster, before Chief Justice Tindall. Sir William Follett, one of the ablest men the English Bar has ever produced, and never surpassed as a subtle cross-examiner, was leading counsel for the plaintiff, whilst Sir John (afterwards Lord) Campbell conducted the defence ; and I will let him tell the story of the trial in his own words :

"I had lain awake the greater part of the night



before, and at last, falling into repose, I had overslept myself, so that I was obliged to dress in a hurry and run off without my breakfast. On my arrival at the Court of Common Pleas, I found the doors surrounded by such an immense crowd that the police could scarcely procure me admittance. The body of the court was almost entirely filled with gentlemen in wigs and gowns, who availed themselves of their professional privilege to enter before the public.

“I was in a state of great tremor till Sir William Follett, counsel for the plaintiff, read the much-talked-of letters of the Prime Minister—then I could breathe, for they were ludicrously immaterial, like the parody of them by Dickens about ‘chops and tomato sauce’ in the trial of *Pickwick*. My confidence increased when the first witness, the clergyman who performed the marriage ceremony, stated to me in cross-examination that in visiting Mrs. Norton he entered the house by the same private door which was to establish the clandestinity of the visits of Lord Melbourne, and that he ‘did so without any improper views upon the wife of his friend.’ Here there was a loud laugh, in which judge and jury joined, and I felt that the verdict was in my pocket. Nevertheless a large body of evidence was brought forward, which, if believed, would have been fatal ; and the plaintiff’s case did not finish till past six in the evening.

“Being somewhat exhausted, and afraid that the jury might be so too, I applied for an adjournment,

which was luckily refused, for I then made a far better speech for effect than I could have made next day.

"When the jury gave their verdict for the defendant there were shouts of applause in court and in Westminster Hall which were heard in the House of Commons, then sitting, and caused a great sensation during the debate. I immediately unrobed and entered the House. As I passed from the Bar to my place I was received with immense cheers from our side, and a few faint ones from the other, uttered by Tories who wished to repel the imputation that the action was a party manoeuvre. I cannot say with whom the action originated, but I do aver that it was taken up with great eagerness by the great bulk of the Tory party, and that they were most cruelly mortified when it failed."

The sensational letters from Lord Melbourne to Mrs. Norton, of which there was so much mysterious talk before the trial, were the following :

(1) "*I will call about half-past four.*

"Yours,

"MELBOURNE."

(2) "*How are you ? I shall not be able to come to-day. I shall to-morrow.*"

(3) "*No House to-day, I will call after levée. If you wish it later, let me know. I will then explain about going to Vauxhall.*

"Yours,

"MELBOURNE."

Sir William read these letters out with impressive gravity, and maintained that “they showed a great and unwarrantable degree of affection, because they did not begin and end with the words, ‘My dear Mrs. Norton,’” and he added, “it seems that there may be latent love, like latent heat, in the midst of icy coldness.” Every one knows the fun which Dickens made out of these letters in “Bardell v. Pickwick.” But I would venture to ask, Are they the sort of notes which a man with a young and handsome wife would like her to be perpetually receiving from a notorious *roué*, even if the writer were Prime Minister of England?

The Honourable George Chapple Norton had done his best to blast the character of his wife and he had failed. But he had other modes of ingenious torture which the law permitted him to exercise. Her children were stolen in her absence, and for a long while she was unable to find whither they had been spirited. When she did discover their place of concealment and attempted to recover possession of them, she was forcibly ejected into the street and found that she had no redress, as her husband was only within his legal rights in claiming the sole custody of the children.

The loss of her children was a terrible deprivation to Mrs. Norton.

“I only saw them by stratagem,” she writes to a dear friend, “by getting up very early and remaining on the watch near the house till they went out for their



morning walk. My eldest, who is seven years old, gave me a little crumpled letter, which he said he had had in his pocket a fortnight, directed to me, but that none of the servants would put it in the post. He was so dear and intelligent, and listened so attentively to what I said to him, that it was a great, though a melancholy, satisfaction to have had this interview. I know he will never forget me."

But not only were her children not her own, the very money which she earned by her personal labours was not her own, but her husband's. He demanded to see the books of her publishers, and to have her fees and royalties paid over to him, and the law was at his back to enforce these demands. All she could do was to blazon her wrongs abroad, and appeal to the people of England to clamour for a repeal of the laws which pressed so cruelly and heavily on married women. Her zeal sometimes outran her discretion in these appeals to the public, and many thought that her famous "Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill" in 1855 was in very bad taste. I am not of that opinion, and I have no hesitation in saying that the story of Mrs. Norton's wrongs, as set forth by her own powerful and eloquent pen, contributed very largely to the repeal or amelioration of the laws which inflicted so much injustice on married women. Let the wives of to-day, who enjoy absolute control over their own earnings and who can claim the custody of their children, if



they have not forfeited the right to do so by their own misconduct, remember with gratitude that they are largely indebted for these privileges to the eloquent, courageous, and untiring agitation of Caroline Norton.

But, with all these trials and troubles to harass her, Mrs. Norton still remained, as she had always been to those who knew her well, a charming woman. Nor did her beauty suffer from her unhappiness. The Baroness Bunsen, who saw her at a drawing-room in 1842, says that of all the beautiful women there she admired none more than Mrs. Norton. And Fanny Kemble, whose description of Mrs. Norton in her early married life I have already quoted, writes of her many years later in these glowing terms :

“Her appearance struck me more than it had ever done. Her dress had something to do with the effect, no doubt. She had a rich gold-coloured silk on, shaded and softened all over with black lace draperies, and her splendid head, neck, and arms were adorned with magnificently simple Etruscan gold ornaments which she had brought from Rome, whence she had just returned, and where the fashion of that famous antique jewellery had lately been revived. She was still ‘une beauté triomphante à faire voir aux ambassadeurs.’

“During one of my last sojourns in London I met Mrs. Norton at Lansdowne House. There was a great assembly there, and she was wandering through the rooms leaning on the arm of her youngest son, her glorious head still crowned with its splendid braids of hair, and

wreathed with grapes and ivy-leaves, and this was my last vision of her ; but, in the autumn of 1870, Lady C—— told me of meeting her in London society, now indeed quite old, but indomitably handsome and witty.”

The Honourable George Chapple Norton died on February 24th, 1875 ; and, after eight-and-forty years of legal bondage to a man whom she detested and despised, a man whose brutal cruelty and undying malice had made her life a misery to her, Caroline Norton, at the age of sixty-seven, found herself a free woman. Two years after, on March 1st, 1877, under circumstances as romantic as those which had attended the union of her sister Helen with Lord Gifford, she married her old and attached friend, Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, the distinguished art-historian. He was ten years younger than his bedridden bride, on whom Death had already laid his finger. As in the case of Lady Dufferin and Lord Gifford, it was but a marriage of sentiment. Mrs. Norton knew that she was dying, but it was a comfort to have constantly with her in her last moments so old and dear and wise a friend. Three months later, on June 15th, with his gentle hand smoothing her still beautiful hair, and his kind voice whispering words of love and courage in her ear, Caroline Norton passed

To where beyond these voices there is peace.

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The youngest of the three sisters Sheridan, Jane

Georgiana, afterwards Duchess of Somerset, is less well remembered now than either Lady Dufferin or Mrs. Norton, but in her day she was a conspicuous figure in society, and she was fortunate enough to contract a marriage which was both happier and more brilliant than that of either of her sisters. Nor was she inferior to either of them in beauty and wit, though I should hesitate to pronounce her their equal as a charming woman. She was a trifle too brusque and sarcastic to render her a universal favourite. But I think I can best illustrate her character by extracts from her own lively letters. Here is one written to her brother Brinsley from Hampton Court, where her mother then had apartments in the Palace.

*“Sunday, January 25th, 1829.*

“We have been to several balls here lately. Really Hampton Court is much gayer than I had imagined. This is the first winter we have spent here since Helen came out. The other day we went to a child’s ball the Duke of Clarence gave to the little Queen of Portugal. The boys were in white ducks with lightish-green jackets, with their hair curled, and Charley had a magnificently worked collar to his shirt. Caroline and I had gold-and-green wreaths with scarlet berries in our hair, and I had a red velvet body, a ‘Maria Stuart,’ which is the fashion now, and white satin skirt. Even little Ghigho, though only two years and a half, went; the Duke would



have him. He was dressed in a crimson velvet frock frilled all round, and a Grecian lace tucker, and his hair curled by Caroline. He looked too beautiful. Helen and Price were at Portsmouth, and so could not come ; they have returned now. The ball began at half-past six o'clock, as it was to be over by twelve o'clock, because the little Queen might not stay up late. The room was so crowded I could not get up to the top where the little Queen was dancing, so I did not see her the whole night ; but Charlie was her *vis-à-vis* once, and Frank danced next her twice. Mamma saw her, and says, although ten years old, she looked fourteen. She was dressed like a grown-up woman, in a pink gauze gown, with her hair turned up and flowers in it."

A year later she thus announces to her brother, to whom she was passionately attached, the fact of her engagement to Edward Adolphus Lord Seymour.

"Sunday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1830.

"MY DARLING BRINNY,—

"Your Georgy is going to be turned into a chaperone. Lord Seymour, the Duke of Somerset's son, asked me yesterday to marry him, and I, being very civil and polite, said 'Yes.' Joking apart, I *am* going to marry him. He is very clever and good. The Duke, his father, has no objection, and is very kind indeed. So are his sisters ; but my acquaintances are rabid and frantic at my daring to do such a thing,



and they turn round after first congratulating mamma, and say : ‘Good Heavens ! is Lord Seymour mad ? What a fool !’ with other pleasing intimations of their good wishes towards me.”

The wedding took place on June 10th, 1830, and is thus described by Lady Dufferin in a letter to a friend :

“June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1830.

“Georgia married on Thursday evening, and a merry wedding it was, only rather patriarchal, as the shy bridegroom induced her to beg that there might be no one present but the members of the respective families. Georgia was dressed in plain white satin, with no ornaments but a diamond brooch and earrings, beautiful blonde *séduisantes*, and a magnificent blonde veil thrown over her head, so large that it nearly reached her feet ; she was to have worn a tiara of diamonds and emeralds on her forehead, which her husband gave her, but unfortunately it was not finished in time. I think I never saw anything so perfectly beautiful as she looked, and she was in excellent spirits. The dinner, which was given by Uncle Graham on the occasion, consisted only of the Duke and his two sons, my mother, and we three daughters, husbands, etc., and my uncles and aunts and the clergyman. After dinner the rooms were lighted up, the back drawing-room arranged as a chapel for the occasion. Georgia put on her veil, and as soon as the gentlemen came up from dinner,

they were married, and immediately set off for Wimbledon Park, his place, which is only five miles out of town. Then the fun commenced for us who were not shy, as the company began to arrive, and a very pleasant party we had, of about two hundred people. Caroline and I were dressed alike, in white satin and pearl ornaments, and so now I think I have given you every circumstance attending the event, and I think you ought to be obliged to me. Both my brothers were there of course, and we made really a gorgeous spectacle, being all so handsome, you know ! ”

To this let me add Lady Somerset's own account of her honeymoon : she writes from Berry Pomeroy near Totnes.

“ Now for myself. I was married on June 10, and went to Wimbledon Park, a place that Lord Seymour's father bought from Lord Spencer. A pretty place, and within a ride from London. There I stayed for about six weeks and then came down here to another place of his father's—an old odd house that was once a monastery, with such old furniture of oddly carved oak, taken out of the old Castle of Berry Pomeroy, which is now a beautiful old ruin. It was bought by the Duke of Somerset in Henry VIII.'s time from the Pomeroy's. The bedstead in my room was the bed of Jane Seymour. About the thirteenth of this month I am going to quit this place, where we only came for Lord Seymour's election, which took place a week ago ; he stands for Okehampton, a town very near here.

His whole soul is in politics, and, though very shy, he does not mind, but rather likes speaking ; and so, as he is very clever, I am in hopes he will make a figure in the House of Commons."

Lord Seymour was not a very brilliant and attractive person, though he inherited some of the intellectual gifts of his father, but he was a good husband and, as Lady Dufferin said, "the kindest and dearest brother-in-law that ever was invented."

That he was also a chivalrous gentleman Lord Seymour proved by his duel with Sir Colquhoun Grant in 1835. The hot-tempered Scotch baronet charged Lord Seymour with being privy to the elopement of his only daughter and heiress with young Brinsley Sheridan. Lord Seymour declined to admit or deny the charge. Sir Colquhoun Grant challenged him ; shots were exchanged without injury to either, and then Lord Seymour assured his adversary that he was absolutely ignorant of even any intimacy between young Sheridan and Miss Grant, and knew nothing of the elopement until after it had taken place. As a matter of fact, the blame rested on Lady Somerset, who, unknown to her husband, had devised the plot and helped her "darling Brinny" to the hand of the heiress.

The most notable public event in Lady Somerset's life was her appearance as the Queen of Beauty at the famous Eglinton tournament in 1839, of which Lord Beaconsfield has given such a gorgeous and glowing picture in *Endymion*. "Georgia" was then in the full



zenith of her magnificent beauty. "Anything so splendid I never gazed upon," said young Disraeli, recounting the scene afterwards. It is matter of history how that ambitious and elaborate attempt to revive the glories of mediæval chivalry, on which Lord Eglinton had lavished so much thought and money, was hopelessly spoiled by the rain, and what should have been the most superb pageant of modern days ended in a fiasco. Waterproofs and umbrellas hid the beautiful costumes of ladies and pages and pursuivants—whilst the pitiless downpour draggled the plumes and rusted the armour of the gallant knights. But the glory of the Queen of Beauty shone through it all; and none who saw her at the ball and banquet which followed the tournament ever forgot her dazzling loveliness.

It was whilst her fame as the Queen of Beauty was still fresh that society was convulsed with amusement over the following correspondence, between Lady Somerset and Lady Shuckburgh touching the engagement of a servant, which was published in the newspapers, and which I quote as it was given in the *Annual Register* under date February 8th, 1840.

#### THE APPLICATION.

"Lady Seymour presents her compliments to Lady Shuckburgh, and would be obliged to her for the character of Mary Stedman, who states that she has lived twelve months, and still is, in Lady Shuckburgh's establishment. Can Mary Stedman cook plain dishes



well ? make bread ? and is she honest, good-tempered, sober, willing, and cleanly ? Lady Seymour would also like to know the reason why she leaves Lady Shuckburgh’s service ? Direct under cover to Lord Seymour, Maiden Bradley.”

THE REPLY.

“Lady Shuckburgh presents her compliments to Lady Seymour. Her ladyship’s note, dated October 28, only reached her yesterday, November 3. Lady Shuckburgh was unacquainted with the name of the kitchen-maid until mentioned by Lady Seymour, as it is her custom neither to apply for or give characters to any of the under-servants, this being always done by the housekeeper, Mrs. Couch—and this was well known to the young woman ; therefore Lady Shuckburgh is surprised at her referring any lady to her for a character. Lady Shuckburgh having a professed cook, as well as a housekeeper, in her establishment, it is not likely she herself should know anything of the abilities or merits of the under-servants ; therefore she is unable to answer Lady Seymour’s note. Lady Shuckburgh cannot imagine Mary Stedman to be capable of cooking for any except the servants’ hall table.—November 4, Pavilion, Hans-place.”

THE RETORT.

“Lady Seymour presents her compliments to lady Shuckburgh, and begs she will order her housekeeper,

Mrs. Pouch, to send the girl's character without delay ; otherwise another young woman will be sought for elsewhere, as Lady Seymour's children cannot remain without their dinners because Lady Shuckburgh, keeping a 'professed cook and a housekeeper,' thinks a knowledge of the details of her establishment beneath her notice. Lady Seymour understood from Stedman that in addition to her other talents, she was actually capable of dressing food fit for the little Shuckburghs to partake of when hungry."

To this note was appended a clever pen-and-ink vignette by the Queen of Beauty, representing the three little Shuckburghs, with large turnip-looking heads and cauliflower wigs, sitting at a round table, eating, and voraciously scrambling for, mutton chops, dressed by Mary Stedman, who is seen looking on with supreme satisfaction, while Lady Shuckburgh appears in the distance in evident dismay.

#### THE REJOINDER.

"Madam,—Lady Shuckburgh has directed me to acquaint you that she declines answering your note, the vulgarity of which is beneath contempt ; and although it may be the characteristic of the Sheridans to be vulgar, coarse, and witty, it is not that of a 'lady,' unless she happens to have been born in a garret and bred in a kitchen. Mary Stedman informs me that your ladyship does not keep either a cook or

a housekeeper, and that you only require a girl who can cook a mutton chop. If so, I apprehend that Mary Stedman, or any other scullion, will be found fully equal to cook for, or manage the establishment of, the Queen of Beauty. I am, your ladyship's, etc.,

“ELIZABETH COUCH (*not* POUCH).”

It seems to me that the grand-daughter of Sheridan met her match on that occasion, and though Lady Shuckburgh's affectation of lofty disdain for domestic details provokes derision, I think the honours rested with her in the end, for Lady Somerset certainly forgot her dignity. She descended to a rudeness and vulgarity which placed her on a level with the housekeeper, whose insolent rejoinder she fairly courted.

Another pretty well-known instance of Lady Somerset's not always agreeable gift of repartee, or, rather, rude response, is the following :

One day she called at a shop to inquire for some article which she had purchased the day before, and which had not been sent home. The order could not be traced. The proprietor of the establishment inquired with great concern : “May I ask who took your Grace's order ? Was it a young gentleman with fair hair ?”

“No,” replied her ladyship sharply ; “it was an elderly nobleman with a bald head.”

Lord Seymour succeeded his father as Duke of Somerset in 1855, and “Georgia” at last wore the

strawberry leaves which crowned her social triumph. But domestic happiness was not her destined lot any more than in the case of her two sisters. In 1865 her second son, Lord Edmund St. Maur, was killed by a tiger in India. Four years later her eldest son, Earl St. Maur, who had led a most adventurous life, first in India during the Mutiny, and then with Garibaldi in Italy, died under painful circumstances, which the duchess, frantic with grief, narrated in detail in a printed letter circulated among her friends.

This production is entitled, "True Account and Real Cause of Earl St. Maur's Sudden Death on September 30, at 20, Dover Street, 1869." She first described with painful minuteness his state of health; he was in a precarious condition, suffering from asthma and convulsions in the chest. On September 29th he had a violent fit of coughing, "and went to sleep in a little back parlour, where I had a little iron bedstead put up. Next morning at about eight, my maid ran into the room—'The Earl is taken ill!' I hurried down the two flights of stairs. 'He is down on the floor!' A clay-cold hand clasps mine. 'Oh, mother!' and he became speechless. My maid and I raised him up, sitting against our knees. I sent a pressing, urgent message to the doctor, 'Earl St. Maur is senseless on the floor.' I remained three-quarters of an hour on my knees, supporting a gasping, apparently dying man.

"Slowly my son recovered. Before he could speak



he nodded when he was asked if the remedy was doing him good. Power of speech at length returned ; he breathed better. Seven hours of daylight saw my son quiet and at ease. After I had taken all possible precautions, if there existed obscure disease, I had, at least, done all I could. I should have had all the advantages which money could procure, all the help which science could give. The result was beyond human means, and I would have been resigned ; but as it was, in an unfurnished dark room, during the fast advancing dusk, without the smallest warning or preparation of any sort, obliged to send out every minute to buy every little item at the cost of precious time lost—feathers to probe the cut, allumettes to see if the air passed through the windpipe—tearing up my night-dress for rags, cutting the strings of my petticoats for the surgeons, waiting on them myself because there were no servants—*expired my only son !* No pauper could have died more denuded of chances ; no wandering Hagar could have seen her son perish more helplessly, or more alone.”

She describes the closing moments in these piteous terms : “When, feeling positive all would soon be over, I advanced and said, ‘All his wishes I know, and would follow out,’ he opened his eyes, turned towards me, and made a great effort to explain something, gave a great shudder and expired. When dying myself I will rather creep under a hedge, or into the cleft of a rock, like a wounded animal, than

be submitted to the humiliating aggravations, stupefied by the swiftness of all these horrors—but I can't forget it or forgive myself. The surgeon turned round, and asked: 'Were there no relations?' Well might he be astonished that the machine, waiting and serving them as in a dream, was the mother! Never can I forgive myself for my want of presence of mind. I am justly punished by the haunting, ever-present horror of that scene."

This hysterical, incoherent style characterises the whole of her extraordinary letter.

Unfortunately the duchess was possessed with the idea that the physician who attended her son, one of the most eminent men in his profession, was the direct cause of Earl St. Maur's death by the mistaken treatment he adopted, and she plainly stated her opinion in the pamphlet. The result was an action for libel on the part of the physician, which was, however, withdrawn after an ample apology from the duchess.

A most capricious, excitable creature was "Georgia." "She delighted in the smaller tyrannies," says one who knew her well. For example, those who accompanied her to feed her pets were imperiously assigned the duty of holding shovels of corn. This she turned into a solemnly grotesque office, and when all were laughing would wave her hand tragically, and say to her friends, "My only amusement!"

"People say," writes one of her intimate friends,

"that her nature changed very much as she got old ; but then she and the duke were both soured, I think, by the loss of their sons, and she had so much suffering. She bore it very bravely ; but, I suppose, it did not soften her. She thought she was going to get well the Friday before she died, and when she reached London that evening, having driven up from Bulstrode (and kept the carriage waiting as usual from ten till two—late to the last), she expressed herself as going to live again at last, having got away from her prison, Bulstrode, but on the Sunday following, the 14th, she died."

The duke thus announces her death in a letter to the brother whom, all her life through, she had so dearly loved :

"40, PARK LANE,

"December 15th, 1884.

"MY DEAR BRINSLEY,—

"Georgy came up to town on Friday, and seemed well—said the drive had done her good. The young Duchess of Montrose called, and they talked and laughed together. On Saturday she felt sleepy, and did not get up ; but the doctor felt her pulse, and said she would be better next morning. But in the night she had shivering fits ; Gwen sent for the doctor, and he said she was better, but on Sunday morning she passed away in a quiet doze. She had suffered so much during the last eight months, and had nearly lost her sight, that it is for her a

comfort, but to us a great loss, for she was always cheery and lively, even in the midst of her suffering.

“Yours affectionately,

“SOMERSET.”

It reads cold and formal that bald, matter-of-fact statement. But the duke was a self-restrained, undemonstrative man—not one to wear his heart upon his sleeve—and those who knew him best said that it was grief and loneliness which within a year laid him beside the beautiful woman who had once been the pride and glory of his life.

The Duchess of Somerset was, to my thinking, the least interesting and the least attractive of the three grand-daughters of Sheridan. She had from her childhood been regarded as a saucy *enfant terrible*, and she seemed to feel it incumbent upon her to sustain that character at all costs and in all company. She could be as unbearably rude as Lady Holland, and her ill-mannered brusqueness in her later days often gave offence, which was never forgiven. Amongst her most irritating defects was her unpunctuality, which was proverbial. She was always late and did not seem to care whom she kept waiting to suit her convenience or indulge her indolence. Even her best friends were constantly annoyed and disgusted by a lack of that consideration for others, which is the hall-mark of good manners and good breeding. Want of thought, no doubt, more than want of heart



was at the root of these faults. But she could be very charming when she chose, and her dazzling beauty condoned many sins of bad taste and bad manners. At her best, she was delightful and fascinating—she not only commanded admiration, but invited liking. That she was not always at her best is only to say that she was human. And in her later life much that was disagreeable and repellent in her speech and manner should be laid to the account of her sorrows and her sufferings. Bereft of all her children, in constant pain, almost blind, and debarred from the enjoyment of the pleasures in which she had delighted—does she not appeal to our pity, this proud Queen of Beauty in dust and ashes, and who will not admit that there was misery enough here to sour the sweetest temper and “change a wholesome heart to gall” ? But she had had her good time—her hour of splendour and of triumph—and she could not complain if the “seven years of plenty” were followed by the “seven years of famine.”

Of the “Three Graces,” I think Lady Dufferin was the happiest, for her life was brightened and sweetened to the end by the beautiful affection between herself and her son ; and that was something far better, far more satisfying, than the strawberry leaves of the Duchess of Somerset, or the laurels of Caroline Norton.

A noble and touching monument to that bond of happiness Lord Dufferin has raised in “Helen’s

Tower," which from its wild and lonely height looks down upon the gateway of the Atlantic :

Helen's Tower, here I stand  
Dominant over sea and land.  
Son's love built me, and I hold  
Mother's love in letter'd gold.  
Love is in and out of time,  
I am mortal stone and lime,  
Would my granite girth were strong  
As either love, to last as long !  
I should wear my crown entire  
To and thro' the Doomsday fire,  
And be found of angel eyes  
In earth's recurring Paradise.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson : "Written at the request of my friend Lord Dufferin."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE HEIRESSES OF ROSS HILL

“O H! that face!—I would, to be beloved by that woman, build and burn another Troy.”

The man who uttered that rhapsody was George Noel Gordon, Lord Byron—the woman who evoked it was Anne Bermingham, Countess of Charlemont. The poet has been dead eighty-three years, but the beauty was living until thirty years ago, though she was born before the United States had separated themselves from Great Britain and was already a reigning belle when the Rebellion of “Ninety-eight” set Ireland in a blaze.

Though originally English, the Berminghams of the 18th century had been so long settled in Ireland that they had become more Irish than the Irish themselves. They had even attained the dignity of a Celtic patronymic—MacFeorais, which, being interpreted, means the son of Pierce—a Bermingham of that name having been the first of the family to set foot on Irish soil among the filibusters whom Henry II. sent over under Strongbow.

For two-and-twenty generations the Berminghams

were Lords of Athenry, a fierce and turbulent race who have left their mark on Irish history. From a younger branch of the ennobled family was descended William Bermingham, of Ross Hill, County Galway, the father of the two beautiful and charming co-heiresses who form the subject of this chapter.

William Bermingham was a man of considerable property—as also was his elder brother John, of Dalgin in the same county, who made an immense fortune in Demerara, the whole of which he left to his illegitimate children, with the exception of an estate in Galway, bringing in a few hundreds a year, which he bequeathed to his lawful widow. Ross Hill, on the wild and picturesque shores of Lough Mask, was a delightfully romantic home, but its beauty was discounted by its extreme loneliness. Even in far more populous parts of Ireland, the parents of eligible heiresses were having a very anxious time, for there was a lawless spirit abroad which sanctioned the good old custom of marriage by capture. The abduction of heiresses was a popular pastime among impecunious Irish bachelors, as a rough-and-ready way of improving their impoverished finances. There were, indeed, Abduction Clubs, at which lists of heiresses were kept, and plans for carrying off rich brides were concocted, the members being sworn to assist one another in these lawless enterprises. The methods adopted were usually the same in all cases. The house of the heiress was surrounded in the dead of night by a band of armed men, in crape masks ;

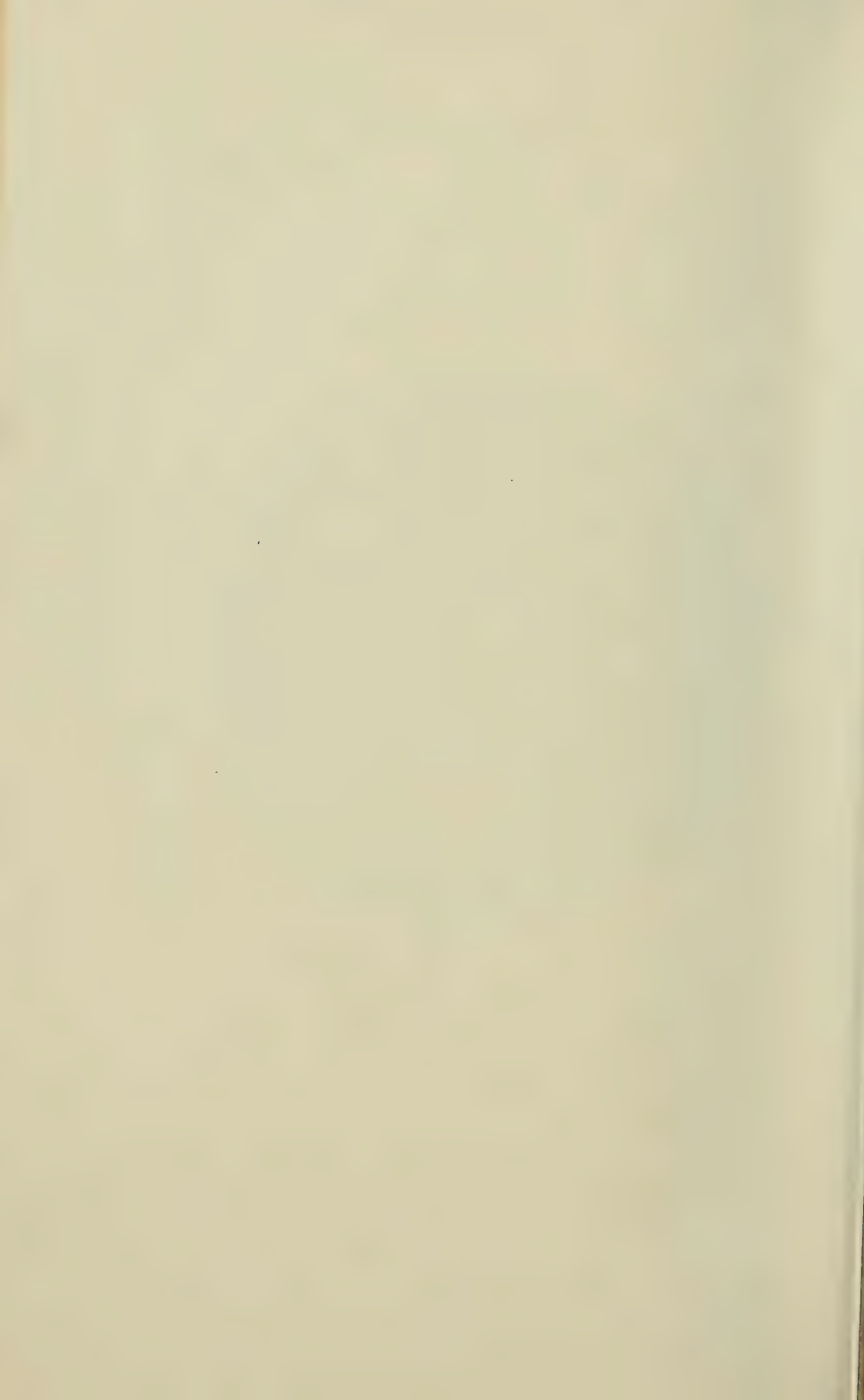




COUNTESS OF CHARLEMONT.

(Anne Bermingham.)

*From a miniature in the possession of the Countess of Charlemont.*



resistance against such odds was useless, and the girl was carried off and forcibly married before the law could be set in motion against the abductors. The country folk invariably sided with the raiders ; and the daring young nobleman or squire who successfully carried off a wealthy bride was regarded as a hero of romance—not less worthy of sympathy and admiration than young Lochinvar or Phauldhrig Crohoore.

Mrs. Delany, in one of her letters, tells a thrilling story of the adventures of a Miss MacDermott who was thus abducted, but who fought so desperately against her captors and so resolutely refused to marry the man who wanted her money, that he and his associates, after most brutally ill-using her, were compelled to abandon her, rather than face her friends who were hurrying to her rescue.

In England, abductors, though less violent in their methods, met with much less public sympathy, and Sir John Johnstone was hanged for his share in carrying off Miss Wharton, the heiress, whom Captain Campbell married by force, and whose marriage was annulled by Act of Parliament in 1696. Edward Gibbon Wakefield, too, the "Father of South Australia," whose life by Dr. Garnett was published in 1898, received a severe sentence of imprisonment for his abduction of Miss Turner, an heiress, whom he inveigled by elaborate trickery to Gretna Green, and whose marriage, like that of Miss Wharton, was dissolved by special Act of Parliament. This was as late as 1827.

William Bermingham, in his lonely home at Ross Hill, with his two lovely daughters growing into womanhood, felt that the wilds of Galway were not a safe place for heiresses, and therefore resolved to take his girls to some more secure asylum. Being a man of keen literary and artistic tastes, he selected Italy as the most attractive spot for his voluntary exile.

Florence was then even more popular than Rome among the English residents in Italy, and the season of 1796, in which the Berminghams made their first appearance there, was more than usually brilliant. Among the leaders of Florentine society Louise Comtesse d'Albanie, widow of Charles Edward Stuart, "The Young Pretender," still held a high place, despite the scandal of her relations with Vittorio Alfieri, and she was at once captivated by the beauty and naïveté of Mary Bermingham, the elder of the two sisters. To have won the favour of the Queen of that select coterie was, of course, an immediate passport to recognition, and Mary was at once installed as the acknowledged "belle of the season." But there were many who thought that they saw in the younger sister, Anne, who was not yet "out," the dawning of a beauty which would eclipse Mary's. Both girls had something of the artist temperament. Mary could paint fairly well—enough to draw fervid expressions of eulogy from the admirers of her beauty. Anne had the gift of reeling off pretty, if rather watery, verses,



and at first there was a freshness and simplicity about the two Irish girls, with their fascinating Irish eyes, and their bewitching Galway brogue, that took every one by storm.

But Mary, though quite unspoiled by the admiration bestowed upon her, in the way most girls might have been expected to be affected—was yet spoiled in another way. She degenerated into a prig—one of those exasperating young women, of whom Miss Julia Mills in “David Copperfield” is the type, the Byronic young creature, who, at eighteen, talks of her blighted life and describes herself as living in “a desert of Sahara.” Mary Bermingham affected to be old and *blasée* at nineteen; and, writing to a friend from Florence, says wearily, “There is not a soul that interests me here but Madame d’Albanie.”

It is amusing to find the girl, not six months escaped from the wilds of Galway, writing thus of the brilliant company in which she found herself at Florence.

“They are all bent on being kind to us. Lady Cowper dressed me last Saturday for a ball at the Casino, where I went with Madame d’Albanie; Lady Webster and Lord Holland came. I bored myself extremely at the ball, and wherever I go I am always bored since I have been at Florence.” And then with comical candour she confesses to perpetual boredom—“when I am not quiet, it is constitutional; so do not scold me. And as for being an old maid, do not speak against that brilliant state, for certain it will be

mine, as the only one I deserve." In the next paragraph she goes on to describe her dress, and, it is a relief to find that there was *one* object in life which could excite a momentary spasm of feminine interest in a mind so deplorably depressed.

"I must tell you about my dress on Saturday, for it was almost entirely the work of Lady Cowper. On my head I had a long roll of crape turned round and round, and between my hair two feathers of half a league in height, sleeves of white satin (this is the fashion for all sorts of dresses), a body of purple satin with little sleeves of the same, and a purple fringe which hung on the white satin; waist very short, and the petticoat of plain muslin; the belt a narrow white satin ribbon with a rosette behind. This is detail enough."

But, apart from this foolish affectation of age and disillusionment, Mary Bermingham's letters are lively and amusing enough. Here is one from Carlsbad, for which, together with the foregoing, I am indebted to Miss Frances Gerard, who, having access to the originals, first published extracts from them in her *Fair Hibernians*. It will be noted that in the following letters Mary alludes to her mother as being with her. Until I saw these letters in Miss Gerard's entertaining book I was under the impression that William Bermingham's wife, who was a Miss Jane Rutledge of Bushfield, County Mayo, and a great beauty in her day, died before the visit of the two girls to Italy.

But that I was mistaken is evident from the references below.

“CARLSBAD,

“*July 9th, 1796.*

“Wednesday we were presented at the reception. I was never more astonished than with several things that occurred. In the first place we entered—my mother and I—and the Baron Schimananski (one of our Poles). We passed quietly into another room, where the sister of the Duchess of Kurland, with a suite of twenty ladies, besieged us from behind, so we had to face round and be presented, one after another. As they were all married, I took no part, but my turn came. From the other end fifty young ladies came and made me curtseys, and overpowered me with English, which they all talked. Really, at the end of quarter of an hour, with all the noise, my senses had departed, and I did not know whether I was standing on my head or my heels. In the end a young person arrived whom every one kissed, and whom every one hastened to present to me as one who talked English. But she was very different from the crowd I had seen hitherto. She was as beautiful as an angel, and really spoke English well. We began talking to each other, and the evening passed very agreeably. But this was not all. We were in the midst of a circle of one hundred persons, young men and young women, when all of a sudden a signal was given, and every one ran to the other side of the *salle* with all their strength.



You may judge how this ruse seized me with astonishment, and I remained stupefied. I thought the house had taken fire. It was only a few cups of chocolate that had caused all this *fracas*. Only for my charming Countess Clare, I should have remained standing in the middle of this enormous *salon* without a living being within a hundred steps of me. I assure you my knees ache with all the curtseys I had to make that night. Amongst the people there were some very nice and very elegant. Madame de Rodenham, her daughters, and Countess Clare, and, above all, the Prince of Saxe-Gotha was very agreeable. The eldest of the princesses, who is beautiful, is in love, they say, with the Prince of Saxe-Gotha. His father sent him here expressly to make up to her ; but he doesn't care for her, and she is so used to be sought out and almost adored by many princes that she is quite piqued by the coldness of this one. We are to be presented to them at the ball on Sunday or Monday, and my mother is to go to the duchess. You know, or do you not know, that the Duke of Kurland is no longer a sovereign prince ; for, seeing the ability of the Empress of Russia, seeing the fate of the King of Poland, trembling for himself, he sold his estates a year ago to the empress ; he is now enormously rich, but no longer a sovereign. He has no son, therefore it is just as well. The gaiety of the Germans is astonishing. You can imagine how it strikes a person who has lived so long in quiet Italy, and who at the age of nineteen is almost an old woman.



I am quite delighted to do my apprenticeship before returning to Ireland, where the young ladies are almost as youthful as here."

Before closing this letter, she gives her correspondent an account of the ball given by the Duchess of Kurland, and from the tone of ill-concealed elation in the letter, it is evident she had been much admired—especially by the Prince of Saxe-Gotha—and enjoyed her triumph as much as so blighted a young being could, evidently forgetful of the fact that she was "almost an old woman."

"I have just returned from the ball, my dear. I danced all the possible, except waltzes, which are not in the least *bon ton*, or *comme il faut*. I have had more partners than I wanted, and am engaged to-night till the fourth with excellent partners, the Prince of Saxe-Gotha amongst others. He is devoted to dancing. . . . Ah! by-the-bye, I want to tell you a little story that the young Count Slam told me yesterday. His father was great friends with Lord Gilford, just when this one left Ireland; they were at Milan, where Lord Gilford bored himself to death. Count Slam said to him,—‘But, my friend, let us try Vienna; perhaps that’ll please you better.’ ‘Oh no,’ said the other, ‘I have a horror of Vienna; I’ll never go there.’ After repeating very often this thing, he said, ‘To satisfy you, I’ll go there for ten days. I leave everything behind me here.’ He went to Vienna, spent three months there without leaving it,

and married Mdlle. de ——. Predestination, my dear! It will be for you one day. I am going to the ball, but I should almost prefer to die than to be always in society; there is nothing which so tires the heart, the spirit, and the soul."

It would really have been a just judgment upon Mary Bermingham for this atrocious priggishness, to be sent back straight to the uncivilised solitudes of Galway. She would probably very soon have found out that life was intolerable without the excitement of that society which she affected to despise. For my part, I have no patience with this maudlin misanthropy of a miss in her teens.

But Fate and Fortune were kind to Mary, kinder than she deserved, and she had reason to thank her stars that her father resolved to quit the social attractions and distractions of Florence for the doubtful sweets of his Irish home. Though he could hardly have chosen a more inopportune moment for his return to Ireland than the close of 1797—the very eve of the great rebellion which cost 50,000 Irish and 20,000 English lives before it was crushed. In Dublin William Bermingham took up his abode during that unhappy time, for he dared not have shown his face in Galway. As it was, his picturesque old homestead was gutted and burned, nothing but the shell left, and had he been there he would assuredly have lost his life.

But when the rebellion was suppressed and the

weight of suspense was at last lifted, Dublin burst out into almost unprecedented gaiety. It was the inevitable reaction after the strain and anxiety, and the season of 1799 was almost hysterically gay and brilliant. The nobility and gentry who had taken refuge in the city were lavish in their hospitality. Lord Cornwallis, the Lord Lieutenant, and Lord Castlereagh, the Secretary for Ireland, vied with one another in the splendour of their entertainments. And among all the Irish and English beauties who lent the chief attraction to these scenes of gaiety and festivity, by common consent, Mary and Anne Bermingham bore away the bell. Lady Morgan, then a gushing young thing of sixteen, wrote to her father, "I never saw two such beautiful creatures as the Berminghams, the youngest the loveliest of the two." Mary, however, was voted the more charming, for she had wit—or perhaps I should rather say *esprit*, a Gallicism for which there is no precise English equivalent—and she had a real sympathy with Art. Her taste was correct, and she could talk with spirit on the subjects which interested her.

Notwithstanding her prophecy that she would die an old maid, she accepted an offer of marriage from the Hon. Nathaniel Clements, the eldest son of Lord Leitrim. Having now arrived at the mature age of one-and-twenty, she probably did not feel quite so old as at nineteen, and marriage did not present altogether such a Sahara-like aspect as it did then. Had the



friend to whom she had poured out those confidences of a worn-out worldling twitted her with inconsistency, she would probably have retorted, *à la* Benedick : "When I said I would die an old maid, I did not think I should live till I were married."

Her marriage to the Hon. Nathaniel Clements took place in the summer of 1800, and four years later, on the death of his father, she became Countess of Leitrim. I think the most remarkable incident in her husband's uneventful career was his refusal to receive the hereditary pension of £985, to which he was entitled in compensation for the abolished place of "Searcher of the Customs in Ireland." How many similar instances are there on record among the aristocracy of such reluctance to take the public money for abolished sinecures? Would not the fingers of one hand be enough and more than enough for the numbering of them? All honour then to the Earl of Leitrim for this noble disdain to bleed the tax-ridden public!

Amongst the coronation honours bestowed by William IV., Leitrim had his share—he was created a peer of the United Kingdom.

Not much is known of the private life of the earl and countess. But I gather, from the pretty frequent appearance of her name in the published lists of those present at fashionable functions, that Countess Mary did not find society such a bore as it used to be in her younger days—nor so dreadfully tiring to "the heart, the spirit, and the soul." Those thin abstractions had



a formidable rival in her vanity, which was not only never tired or bored by flattery and admiration, but could not long exist without such titillating joys.

Marriage, with its duties and responsibilities, knocked all that youthful nonsense out of her and she became an exemplary matron and mother, whilst still retaining much of her beauty and her charm of manner and speech. She bore the earl four sons and three daughters. One of the former was a Canon of Durham Cathedral and Rector of the fat living of Norton in that diocese. It was while she was on a visit to him in the February of 1840 that Lady Leitrim died somewhat suddenly at the Spa Hotel, Durham, in her 62nd year. Her husband, who survived her fifteen years, had reached the age of 86, when his death took place at Killadoon, his seat in County Kildare, on January 30th, 1855.

Lady Leitrim's eldest son died before her at the age of thirty-three ; but kindly Fate mercifully spared her the fearful shock which she must inevitably have suffered from the dreadful end of her second son, William Sydney Clements, who succeeded to the title on the death of his father, and met his death under exceptionally tragic circumstances, which sent a thrill of horror through the whole country. On April 2nd, 1878, as he was driving home in the dusk with his clerk, a volley was fired into the car from behind a hedge, and the earl, his clerk, and the driver were instantly shot dead. He was a man of

iron will and dauntless courage, but cruel and ruthless alike in his loves and his hates. He never married, but it was said that he consoled himself with illicit amours of such a character as to foster a deep craving for revenge in the hearts of many fathers and brothers. A most savage attack was made upon the character of the murdered earl by Mr. O'Donnell in the House of Commons, which was backed up by an equally sensational speech from Mr. Parnell. The House was shocked and scandalised, and pronounced for a secret sitting, from which reporters were excluded. For some hours the whole gear of legislation was thrown into confusion by the fierce fight over the character of the Earl of Leitrim, whose murder, the Irish members contended, had nothing whatever to do with agrarianism, but was purely an act of private and justifiable vengeance. That was the last time the name of any of the descendants of Mary Bermingham, Countess of Leitrim, has figured prominently before the public.

Her sister Anne, if the less charming, was the more beautiful of the two, and, thanks to her acquaintance with Tom Moore and Lord Byron, has gained greater celebrity. Two years after Mary's marriage Anne made an equally brilliant match, and selected from a crowd of suitors Francis William, Lord Caulfeild, second Earl of Charlemont.

The first Earl of Charlemont had been the idol of his countrymen, a man of stainless character, of high intelligence, of rare culture. It is thus that

Henry Grattan eulogises him in one of his bursts of epigrammatic eloquence :

“Formed to unite the aristocracy and the people : with the manners of a Court and the principles of a patriot : with the flame of liberty and the love of order : unassailable by the approaches of power, of profit, or of titles : he annexed to the love of freedom a veneration for order, and cast on the crowd that followed him the gracious light of his own accomplishments, so that the very rabble grew civilised as it approached his person.”

His magnificent town mansion, Charlemont House, built in 1763 from designs by Sir William Chambers, the great architect to whom London owes Somerset House, was crammed full of priceless literary and artistic treasures—books, pictures, sculpture, china, and its hospitable doors were ever open to the wits and beauties, the *savants* and *virtuosi* of Dublin Society. But, large as Charlemont House was, it could not afford room for all the treasures of the artistic earl, and he therefore commissioned the eminent Italian architect, Verpyle, to build for him at Clontarf another beautiful house from designs by Cipriani, best known, perhaps, to Londoners, at any rate, as the painter of the Lord Mayor's state coach ! This seaside retreat, buried among woods, just five miles from Dublin, was named Marino, and is described as “the very perfection of architectural elegance, being of the Sicilian Doric order, constructed



of stone of dazzling whiteness, and raised upon a square base."

Lord Charlemont was, moreover, a member of the famous Literary Club, founded by Sir Joshua Reynolds, of which Dr. Johnson, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith, and David Garrick were the shining lights. It was Lord Charlemont that once had the audacity to chaff the great Panjandrum himself, who was a stout advocate of dancing, on his dancing lessons from the then most eminent dancing master in Europe, the father of the fair Vestris whom Charles Mathews married.

"I ventured," writes Bozzy, "to mention a ludicrous paragraph in the newspapers that Dr. Johnson was learning to dance of Vestris. Lord Charlemont, wishing to excite him to talk, proposed in a whisper that he should be asked whether it was true. 'Shall I ask him?' said his lordship. We were, by a great majority, clear for the experiment. Upon which his lordship very gravely and with a courteous air said :

" 'Pray, sir, is it true that you are taking lessons of Vestris?'

"This was risking a good deal, and required the boldness of a General of Irish Volunteers to make the attempt. Johnson was at first startled, and in some heat answered :

" 'How can your lordship ask so simple a question?'

"But immediately recovering himself, whether from



unwillingness to be deceived, or whether from real good humour, he kept up the joke.

“ ‘Nay, but if anybody were to answer the paragraph and contradict it, I’d have a reply and would say that he who contradicted it was no friend either to Vestris or me. For why should not Dr. Johnson add to his other powers a little corporeal agility? Socrates learned to dance at an advanced age, and Cato learned Greek at an advanced age. Then it might proceed to say that this Johnson, not content with dancing on the ground, might dance on the rope: and this might introduce the elephant dancing on the rope.’ ”

The picture of the ponderous doctor dancing certainly must have suggested the elephant to his listeners—or possibly the bear. But he was under no illusion as to his corporeal unwieldiness, and had the saving gift of a sense of humour.

The second Earl of Charlemont was intellectually far inferior to his father, but he inherited some of his sire’s artistic tastes, and, though he made no attempt to distinguish himself in public life, was recognised by all who had the pleasure of knowing him in private as a man of considerable information, with a wonderful memory, and a very pretty wit which scintillated through his conversation. Those who, when they saw him riding as a boy of five beside his father at the grand review of those famous “Irish Volunteers,” whom the first earl was largely instrumental in raising, enthusiastically hailed him as the “hope

of Ireland," were doomed to disappointment. For, though the young earl always acted in accordance with his father's liberal principles on such subjects as Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary reform, he seldom spoke in the House of Lords, to which he was returned as a representative Irish peer, and took very little active part in politics.

The first years of his married life were mostly spent abroad with his wife, and both of them seem to have preferred the Continent to Ireland. Italy was their favourite haunt, and at Florence Anne renewed her friendship with the Comtesse d'Albanie, "grown older and fatter, but as kind as ever." It was only natural that Lady Charlemont should like Italy, for nowhere else was such enthusiastic homage paid to her person. Tom Moore says that Lady Mansfield told him that the effect Lady Charlemont produced at Florence by her beauty was extraordinary, "the Italians were ready to fall down and worship her." But even in our colder Northern clime men felt the witchery of her charms. Moore, who was constantly calling upon her in London, invariably speaks of her as "that beautiful creature." Samuel Rogers was an equally ardent admirer. "Lady Charlemont," he writes to Moore, "is again on the wing for Dublin and as beautiful as ever. She talks of your songs with the same enthusiasm she used to." Her own little twitterings in verse were extravagantly praised by Moore, and hence their mutual admiration. "Claw me and I'll

claw thee," is a good motto, and produced many mutual admiration cliques in literature before the bare-faced logrollers of our own days.

But all Lady Charlemont's admirers were tame in their admiration compared with Byron. "Thoroughly unspoiled by all the homage paid to her," writes Moore, "that beautiful creature Lady Charlemont has not yet seen Lord Byron's tribute to her beauty." The reference is to the following lines which appeared in the first edition of *Don Juan*, but were afterwards expunged, at the express wish, it is said, of Lady Charlemont herself, who agreed with her husband that it was a dubious compliment to any woman to be immortalised in a poem which met with such severe and general disapprobation. Possibly the lady's good sense suggested to her that the "tribute" was somewhat exaggerated. Let the reader judge :

There was an Irish lady, to whose bust  
I ne'er saw justice done, and yet she was  
A frequent model ; and if e'er she must  
Yield to stern time and Nature's wrinkling laws  
They will destroy a face which mortal thought  
Ne'er compassed, nor less mortal chisel wrought.

Byron, however, expressed himself quite as fervently in sober prose—as witness the quotation from his diary with which I opened, and the following passage in a letter to Bowles, "the head of Lady Charlemont seemed to possess all that sculpture could require for its ideal."

Spiteful members of her own sex, unable to find



fault with her looks, avenged themselves by pronouncing her "silly." Some of her maladroit sayings were circulated with malicious gusto—but whether they were inventions or not there is now no means of deciding. Here are a couple of specimens. Hearing some one praise Bacon's works, which she imagined to be the latest thing out in new books, she called out to her husband, "Oh! Charlemont, do let us have a Bacon; we must get Bacon's books." On another occasion her hostess paired her off at dinner with the American Minister, Van Houten, who was somewhat astonished at her ladyship's plying him with questions about lions and tigers, as if he were a mighty hunter of big game. He professed his ignorance of the subject, but Lady Charlemont, taking these professions as the mere subterfuges of a modest man, pressed her point and said earnestly :

"Oh! Mr. Van Hamburg, you must tell me what you feel when you have your head in the lion's mouth!"

Her ladyship was under the impression that she was conversing with Van Amburgh the lion-tamer!

Lady Charlemont was one of the "Blue Stockings," that famous coterie of dilettantes who affected a love of science and the higher art—not a more foolish cult, I think, than some in which the society women of the present day indulge. It was little more than the jargon of the scientist and the artist that they picked up, but if they liked to talk of things of which they knew nothing,



is it not, after all, what many charming women of to-day also do? And then, how much one can forgive to a woman who is both beautiful and charming!

If to her share some female errors fall,  
Look on her face, and you'll forget them all.

Lady Charlemont did well to make the most of the gratifications which her beauty brought her, for her life was not one of happiness. She had, indeed, a larger share of domestic sorrow than falls to the lot of most women. All her children died long before her. Moore gives us a glimpse of her first bereavement in this extract from his diary in 1827:

“Went over to the Charlemonts to pass the day at a very pretty place near Teddington. They were just recovering from the loss of one of their daughters, who died of a long illness. The other girl, a very lovely person, felt it so much that they have great fears of her.”

Those fears were but too prophetic. She died that same year, and her death was quickly followed by that of the only surviving son of the earl and countess, James, Lord Caulfeild, a young man of much promise. It was not surprising that Lord Charlemont, after these crushing bereavements, should have retired from society, and shut himself for the remainder of his life in his beautiful country house at Clontarf. He found fitter solace wandering alone among the quiet woods of Marino, or listening to “the swelling of the voiceful

sea," than in "the hum of human cities." He might have said with Edmund Burke, "I live in an inverted order. They who ought to have succeeded me are gone before me : they who should have been to me as posterity are in the place of ancestors."

But, though nothing would induce him to quit his seclusion, and it was seldom that the profound stillness of his life at Clontarf was broken, even by the visits of friends, yet he was always ready to lend his name and influence to the promotion of every truly philanthropic or patriotic object, and, though unostentatious, he was generous in his charity. Those who had the privilege of being admitted now and then as guests to Marino found the earl an admirable host, with a wonderful memory, stocked with anecdotes of Burke, Grattan, and Flood, and other famous men whom he had known in his youth. Here, in the house which had been his father's pride, and which for so many years had been his own beloved home, the childless earl died on December 26th, 1863, at the patriarchal age of eighty-eight.

Meanwhile his wife had sought consolation in the society which her husband eschewed. It was not in the nature of Lady Charlemont to shut herself up from the world, and, besides, her position as Lady of the Bedchamber to the Queen, an office which she held till 1854, demanded her presence at Court. People who still call themselves middle-aged can remember seeing a "tiny shrivelled old lady driving about Dublin in

an old-fashioned chariot with hammercloth emblazoned with the Charlemont arms," and hearing their elders speak of her as the once famous beauty, Lady Charlemont. To the last she kept up her "blue-stocking" tastes, and her fragile little figure was familiar to all who attended the lectures at the Dublin Society's House, whilst anything in the shape of an artistic gathering always had her patronage.

She outlived her beauty, her husband, her children—all her rivals and contemporaries had long joined the great majority, death seemed almost to have forgotten her and did not wake up to his forgetfulness till she had completed her 95th year. Then at last came "the one clear call," and readers of the *Morning Post* on Saturday, November 25th, 1876, saw the following paragraph :

"We have to announce the death of Anne, Dowager Countess of Charlemont, which took place yesterday, at her residence in Upper Grosvenor Street, at the great age of 95 years. Her ladyship was the youngest daughter and co-heir of the late Mr. W. Bermingham, of Rosshill, County Galway, and married, 9th February, 1802, Francis William, 1st Earl of Charlemont, who predeceased the Countess in December 1863."

That was the longest obituary notice which either the English or Irish press deigned to give the most beautiful and charming woman of her time—the idol of poets and the despair of sculptors!

The Countess of Charlemont enjoys the distinction of having attained a greater age than any other



celebrated beauty. The Countess of Cork (Mary Monckton, of whom I have written elsewhere), however, ran her very close, for she had just entered on her 95th year when she died suddenly in 1840, and Lady Charlotte Bury had passed her 92nd year at the time of her death. Indeed the longevity of Queens of Beauty has been remarkable. Mary and Agnes Berry attained the ages respectively of 89 and 87. Mrs. Gwyn ("The Jessamy Bride," the younger of the Hornecks), and Mrs. Procter (wife of "Barry Cornwall"), whose stories I have told in *Dainty Dames of Society*, both lived to pass their 88th years. The Countess of Suffolk (Henrietta Howard) reached 86; Mrs. Bracegirdle 85, Lady Sarah Napier 88, Lady Morgan 83, Fanny Kemble 85, and the number of those between three-score and ten and four-score would swell the list beyond the limits of my space. But age, with its "cold gradations of decay," can scarcely offer much to be desired by a Queen of Beauty. For it has been given to few beautiful women to retain their charms in any appreciable degree to the end of a long life. There have been some, however, to whom time has been exceptionally kind. "The Jessamy Bride" was one. "In her," says Hazlitt, "the Graces triumphed over time; she was one of Ninon de L'Enclos' people on the list of Immortals." Kitty Hyde, Duchess of Queensberry, was another. Horace Walpole tells us, that when she was seventy-seven "one would sooner take her for a



young beauty of an old-fashioned century than for an antiquated goddess of this age." And there are many still on the sunny side of forty who can remember the extraordinary youthfulness and charm of Anne Benson Procter, of whom James Russell Lowell wrote :

I know a young girl of seventeen  
Who tells me she is seventy.

But to most Queens of Beauty old age has only brought dethronement—the bitterness of mortified vanity—the galling spectacle of younger rivals reigning in their stead—the consciousness of being the objects of a pity more humiliating than obloquy or neglect.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE QUEEN OF ALMACK'S

THERE have been three celebrated Countesses of Jersey, and the career of each was more or less romantic. The first was Barbara Chiffinch, daughter of William Chiffinch, Keeper of the Closet to Charles II., a gentleman whose confidential relations with the Merry Monarch were of the most scandalous character. The fair Barbara inherited the paternal talent for intrigue. But her intrigues were all in the interests of her husband, and left no stain upon her reputation as a wife. Like the virtuous woman eulogised by Solomon, she was, if not a crown, at any rate a coronet, to her spouse, for she helped largely towards securing him the Earldom of Jersey from William III., whom he faithfully served.

Then there was the fourth countess, of unsavoury notoriety, "the beautiful Miss Twysden," daughter of the Bishop of Raphoe, who wrought sad havoc with the domestic peace of our Fourth George, and treacherously poisoned his mind against his unhappy consort, Queen Caroline.

Thirdly, there was Sarah Sophia Child Fane, the



*From an engraving, after the picture by E. T. Parris.*

THE COUNTESS OF JERSEY.





fifth Countess, the brilliant Empress of Fashion, who reigned for fifty years, a very Zenobia of Society, a proud, peerless, majestic, despotic Queen of Beauty. It is with her that I am now immediately concerned.

She was a veritable child of romance—in more senses than one—and her romance began before she was born.

Her mother was Anne Child, only daughter and heiress of Robert Child, the head of the great banking house at Temple Bar.

Among the banker's aristocratic clients was John, tenth Earl of Westmorland, one of the wildest young spendthrifts and scapegraces of his day. He was up to his eyes in debt, and had confided his embarrassments to Mr. Child in the hope that the Bank might put his affairs straight.

On an afternoon in May, in the year 1782, the earl was the banker's guest at a *tête-à-tête* dinner in the comfortable dining-room over the Bank. They had been sitting over their port for some time when the young nobleman said :

"Now, Mr. Child, we have been discussing a good many business questions, but there is one of a different character on which I should like much to have your opinion and advice."

"And what is that, Lord Westmorland ?"

"Suppose, Mr. Child, that you were in love with a girl and she with you, but her father refused his consent to the union—what would you do?"

"Why, run away with her, to be sure," was the prompt reply.

The generous wine, warming heart and head, for once made the banker forgetful of caution, and prompted his impulsive reply. Before he was many hours older he had bitter cause to repent of that reckless advice, for the young man to whom he had given it took him at his word.

Two days later, Mr. Child was roused from his sleep in the small hours of the morning by a vigorous knocking at his front door, accompanied by the shrill alarm of the watchman's rattle. He sprang out of bed, and descending the stairs in his dressing-gown, found the door of the house wide open, and a "Charley" standing there, rattle in hand, confronting the terrified butler and footman in their nightshirts.

"What is the meaning of this?" said the banker, sternly.

"Please, yer honour, as I was passin' the house on my beat I see the door wide open, and as in duty bound I gave the alarm."

Mr. Child turned to the butler.

"What is it—thieves?"

"No, sir, I think not," said the shivering butler.

Something, however, was evidently wrong and a search was promptly instituted. Then it was discovered that Miss Child was missing. Her duenna, who slept in an outer room, through which alone was access to Miss Anne's bed-chamber, had been

drugged by the maid who had accompanied the young lady in her flight, and, had the fugitives only taken the precaution to close the front door after them, their absence would not have been detected till the morning. Mr. Child's suspicions at once fell upon the Earl of Westmorland. He went straight to his lordship's house in Berkeley Square, and by lavish bribing, discovered that the earl and Miss Child had eloped in a post-chaise and four. The furious father set out in pursuit without a moment's delay. His heavy purse enabled him to procure better horses and more frequent relays than Lord Westmorland, who had no doubt calculated on gaining a much longer start. And before they were forty miles from London the runaway couple were overtaken, at Baldock in Hertfordshire. Mr. Child's chaise was abreast of the other and the banker was standing on the step, prepared to jump, when one of Lord Westmorland's postboys drew a pistol and shot Mr. Child's near leader dead. Whether he fired by the earl's instructions or not was never explained, but he undoubtedly saved the situation, and Lord Westmorland in gratitude took the lad, Gilham by name, into his service, where he remained in receipt of a good pension till he died, sixty years later.

By the time the traces had been cut from the dead horse, the fugitives were out of sight, and were never overtaken, though the enraged father, according

to one version of the story, chased his daughter right across the border to Gretna Green, only to find, when he got there, that the blacksmith had tied the knot, and the lovers were man and wife.

Mr. Child returned to London baffled and exasperated. He swore that his daughter should never have a penny of his money, and that he would hold no further communication of any kind with her to the day of his death. He spurned all attempts at reconciliation, refused to recognise the firstborn child of the marriage as his grandson, and forbade the name of his daughter or her husband to be mentioned in his hearing.

But three years later, when a girl was born, and he learned that Lady Westmorland was dangerously ill, the stern father's heart softened. He was reconciled to his daughter ; and, though he never forgave her husband, and always detested his grandson, yet when he died he bequeathed to the Countess of Westmorland the whole of his immense fortune and his interest in the bank, with the proviso, however, attached, that not a farthing should go to any of the male issue of the marriage. Consequently, the great inheritance, £50,000 a year, besides the largest share in the profits of the bank, fell eventually to the eldest daughter and only surviving child of the earl and countess, Lady Sarah Sophia Child Fane, who was born on March 4th, 1785.

The richest heiress in England naturally attracted a



swarm of suitors—but it is only fair to some of them, at any rate, to say that her beauty was quite as great an attraction as her wealth. It was beauty of the Junoesque order—regal, majestic, affluent. Sir Thomas Lawrence's superb portrait reveals her as a tall woman of splendid figure, exquisitely rounded and proportioned, with regular features, a small nose, dark, silken hair, deep blue eyes, a skin fair as alabaster, through which the veins showed like threads of delicate azure.

But none of the proud beauty's admirers won even so much as transient favour till Lord George Villiers, eldest son of the Earl of Jersey, came upon the scene. He was twelve years her senior, but still under thirty, a man of commanding stature, aristocratic air, and handsome features. Fortunately, he owed little except his face to his detestable mother. His high sense of honour, his fearless nature, his sporting instincts, his skill in horsemanship were all derived from his sire, a man of stainless character and chivalrous spirit. The young Villiers was already well known in the hunting-field as one of the most daring horsemen among the first flight of bold riders, who were then the wonder and the pride of the Midlands. His "grand air" in the saddle had won him the admiration of all the hunting men and women in the "Shires." Lady Sarah Sophia fell in love with him at first sight and he with her. They were the most devoted lovers, and, though the difference in their temperaments proved

as wide as it well could be, their affection remained unchanged till death parted them.

They were married on May 13th, 1804. In the following year Lord Villiers, on the demise of his father, became fifth Earl of Jersey.

The openly scandalous relations of her husband's mother with the Prince Regent were a source of painful embarrassment to the young countess in her connection with the Court. The earl felt as strongly as she did on the subject ; and was not on speaking terms with his mother.

In 1814 the dowager countess allowed her bitter and relentless hatred of the Princess Caroline to betray her into overt acts of opposition to the Regent's unhappy consort, which created a grave scandal and infuriated the public, who believed that the evil influence of the prince's mistress was largely responsible for his attitude towards his wife. That she did her utmost to poison his mind against the princess and convince him that he was dishonoured and disgraced by his consort's shameless infidelities there can be no doubt. The earl and countess, who were both in sympathy with the slandered princess, felt that their position at Court was untenable. Their dignity and their honour were outraged. Whilst the dowager countess flaunted her shame and openly boasted of her influence over the prince, her daughter-in-law decided that Carlton House was no longer a place where any woman with the commonest self-respect and sense of decency could

permit herself to be seen. She refused, therefore, to appear any more at a Court presided over by the Regent. The prince was furious. He sent back her portrait, which had hitherto held the place of honour in his Gallery of Beauties, and that mean revenge prompted Byron, who was then a devoted admirer of Lady Jersey's, to pen his "Condolatory Address to Sarah Countess of Jersey, on the Prince Regent's returning her Picture to Mrs. Mee." The tribute to her beauty,

The grace of mien  
The eye that gladdens and the brow serene :  
The glossy darkness of that clustering hair  
Which shades, yet shows that forehead more than fair,

perhaps gratified her less than the poet's measureless scorn of her insulter. "The dotard—with corrupted eye and withered heart," "the paltry heart that pleases none,"

That dull cold sensualist, whose sickly eye  
In envious dimness passed thy portrait by :  
Who rack'd his little spirit to combine  
Its hate of *Freedom's* loveliness and *thine*.

These barbed arrows, with a sting which she knew would pierce even the tough hide of her royal enemy—these, doubtless, gave her unmixed pleasure and satisfaction.

The young countess took her own revenge on the Regent by openly and enthusiastically espousing the cause of his wife. The prince sent a letter by Colonel



Willis, announcing that he ceased henceforth to number the Countess of Jersey among his friends. Some little time after this formal dismissal from Court the prince and Lady Jersey met at a great party given by Henry Hope in his mansion in Cavendish Square. Lady Jersey was walking with Samuel Rogers in the gallery when they came face to face with the Regent, who stopped for a moment and then, drawing himself up, marched past them with a look of the utmost disdain. Lady Jersey returned the look to the full, and as soon as the prince had passed, turned to her companion with a smile and said,

“Didn’t I do it well?”

But Lady Jersey needed no countenance from royalty. She held her own Court both in town and country. Under her sway Middleton Park, Lord Jersey’s Oxfordshire seat, took on the semblance of a palace. The ordinary staff of household servants numbered seventy, and on great occasions there were large additions to that number. There were times when, with guests and their suites, 1,600 persons were entertained in a week. Here Lady Jersey loved to gather round her politicians of the heavier calibre, men like the Duke of Wellington, Canning, Castlereagh, and Peel, and she moved among them like a queen. Lord Jersey left all this ceremonial state entirely in his wife’s hands, and found ample employment for his own energies in his superb racing-stables. Politics had little interest for him. He took his seat regularly,



indeed, in the House of Lords and dutifully voted as his wife or the party-leader directed him to do, but he never opened his mouth in debate. Once, however, he created a sensation in the House. He rose suddenly from his seat during a debate, and there went through the assembly a thrill of expectancy. "Jersey's going to speak!" passed in an astonished whisper from lip to lip. There was breathless stillness. But Lord Jersey merely went to shut a door and sat down again without uttering a word. The mountain had not brought forth even a mouse.

But he was a power in the Jockey Club and on the Turf—a fine example of the patrician sportsman, racing his horses for the love of sport, scorning to recoup himself for his princely outlay by heavy betting, contented with the pride of seeing his judgment in breeding vindicated on the race-course. That was his reading of the motto of his order "*Noblesse oblige.*"

I have already referred to Byron's friendship with Lady Jersey, but it is not generally known, I think, how much he owed to that friendship in the darkest hour of his life. When the scandal of his separation from his wife brought execration on his name and closed every other door against him, he found an asylum under Lady Jersey's roof at Middleton. There he hid himself from the world's loathing and scorn, and, with a heart full of bitterness and resentment, brooded in morose solitude over his wrongs. How

long he remained there I do not know, but some curious light was thrown on this obscure episode in Byron's life some thirty years ago, by a lady who had enjoyed the countess's confidence and had heard the story from Lady Jersey's lips. According to her account Byron was on the verge of insanity during his sojourn at Middleton. When the evil fit was on him, as it often was for many days, he would hold no communication with any member of the household, but locked himself up in his room and lived on hard biscuits and water.

In the dead of night, when every one in the house was asleep, he would steal out like a ghost, roam bare-headed among the woods till daylight, and then creep back haggard and exhausted, seen only by the keepers on their nightly rounds, or by stray labourers going to their early work at dawn.

Lord and Lady Jersey, with infinite pity for their strange guest, did not interfere with him, but let him "gang his ain gate." If he chose to come down to dinner, they treated him with the utmost kindness, and avoided any reference to his absences.

There was a neighbouring nobleman who had a reputation for hard drinking. Whenever Byron found out that this redoubtable toper was an expected guest he invariably made his appearance at the dinner-table, and, though he had been living like an anchorite for days perhaps, he would challenge the mighty toss-pot to a drinking bout. They were Homeric contests,

involving the consumption of "lashins of liquor," but the poet always won, and walked coolly and steadily to bed, leaving the servants to carry his vanquished rival to a couch of ignominy.

Byron was never known to refer to this sombre passage in his life, and possibly no one but his host and hostess were cognisant of it. He certainly ignored it when, in one of his conversations with the Countess of Blessington, he said, "I spent a week at Lady Jersey's once and very agreeably it passed: the guests were well chosen, the host and hostess 'on hospitable thoughts intent,' the establishment combining all the luxury of a *maison montée en prince* with the ease and comfort of a well-ordered house."

But Lady Jersey not only gave Byron her private sympathy—she boldly stood by him before all the world, and publicly proclaimed her friendship by holding an "Assembly" expressly to bid him farewell on his departure from England in 1816. In the then state of feeling towards Byron, which had been intensified by the publication of his poems "Fare thee Well" and "The Sketch," this was an heroic defiance of the prejudices of society.

Tom Moore, in his *Life of Byron*, says, "Nothing short perhaps of that high station, which a life as blameless as it is brilliant has secured her, could have placed beyond all reach of misapprehension, at that moment, such a compliment to one marked with the world's censure so deeply."



Whether Byron were as grateful to Lady Jersey as he should have been is a matter of doubt. Gratitude was not a strong point in his character. His references to her in his letters are cold and casual. And, when talking of her six years later to Lady Blessington, he had no warmer words to express his feelings for her than these :

“Of all that *coterie*, Madame de —, after Lady Jersey, was the best ; at least I thought so, for these two ladies were the only ones who ventured to protect me when all London was crying out against me on the separation, and *they* behaved courageously and kindly ; indeed Madame de — defended me when few dared to do so, and I have always remembered it. Poor dear Lady Jersey ! does she still retain her beautiful cream-coloured complexion and raven hair ? I used to long to tell her that she spoiled her looks by her excessive animation ; for eyes, tongue, head, and arms were all in movement at once, and were only relieved from their active service by want of respiration. I shall never forget when she once complained to me of the fatigues of literary occupations, and I in terror expected her ladyship to propose reading to me an epic poem, tragedy, or at least a novel of her composition, when lo ! she displayed to me a very richly bound album, half filled with printed extracts cut out of newspapers and magazines which she had selected and pasted in the book ; and I (happy at being let off so easily) sincerely agreed with



her that literature was very tiresome. I understand that she has now advanced with the march of intellect, and got an album filled with MS. poetry, to which all of us of the *craft* have contributed. I was the first ; Moore wrote something which was, like all that he writes, very sparkling and terse ; but he got dissatisfied with the faint praise it met with from the husband before Miladi saw the verses, and destroyed the effusion : I know not if he ever has supplied their place. Can you fancy Moore paying attention to the opinion of Milord on poesy ? Had it been on racing or horse-flesh he might have been right ; but Pegasus is, perhaps, the only horse of whose paces Lord Jersey could not be a judge."

It will be noted that Byron takes exception to Lady Jersey's "excessive animation." The phrase but feebly indicates the distressing energy and strenuousness of her temperament. There was no repose about her. She talked loudly, with deliberate intention, that no one should ever accuse her of flirtation, and so incessantly that her friends ironically dubbed her "Silence." The Countess Granville in her letters refers constantly to "the indefatigable Silence," and gives quite an appalling picture of her demonic activity in Paris. "She is really wonderful, and how she can stand the life she leads is still more wonderful. She sees everybody in her own house and calls on everybody in theirs. She is all over Paris and at all the *campagnes* within ten miles, and in all *petites soirées*.

. . . She begins the day with a dancing master at nine o'clock and never rests till midnight." And again : "At ten o'clock yesterday morning Lady Jersey called for me and we never stopped to take breath till eleven o'clock at night, when she set me down here more dead than alive, she going to end the day with the Hollands." Bonbon shops, china shops, milliners, theatres, opera, Lady Jersey dashed through them all at headlong speed and was never still for five minutes. If this restless energy were trying to her friends, it must have been still more exasperating to her husband, whose temperament was abnormally languid and indolent. So much so, indeed, that it roused his wife's indignation and prompted her to sarcasm. Fortunately Lord Jersey was, as Lady Granville says, "perfection in his temper," and it was difficult even for Lady Jersey to quarrel with him, though there were times when his temper, placid as it was, was strained to breaking point. But she was certainly worse when she was away from him, for his presence had a restraining effect upon her. When she was apart from him she was in perpetual hot water. Lady Granville, whom they both liked and who liked them, says, "I would risk my life freely for them rather than spend a week with them. . . Lady Jersey is a tiresome, quarrelsome woman, but having in her no rancour or bad feeling, and forgetting one minute what she had said, done, or thought the last."

At times, too, when unaccompanied by her husband,

she affected a prudery which was exasperating to those who knew her, and ridiculous to those who did not. Once in Paris, she declared herself afraid to go in a carriage alone with Lord John Russell, whose physique was singularly insignificant, and implored General Alava to chaperon her. The amused General exclaimed : "Diable ! vous devez être peu sûre de vous si vous craigniez rester seule avec le petit Lor' Jan !"

When the trial of Queen Caroline came on, Lady Jersey wore herself to the bone on behalf of the persecuted consort of George IV. Indeed she was so entirely obsessed by the subject, that her friends feared for her sanity. Lady Granville gives us several glimpses of her at this period. The trial commenced on August 19th, 1820, and lasted till November 10th. On August 24th, Lady Granville writes, "I found Lady Jersey, her face all drawn into strong lines and fifteen years older." On another occasion, "Lady Jersey was quite insane, with tears in either eye." And again, describing a visit to the Duke of Bedford at Woburn, "Lady Jersey is too absorbed to think who is for and who against. She sits netting and raving, and it sometimes comes across my mind that she will go out of hers. Her countenance is become so stern and political that it affects her beauty. She occasionally stands up and gesticulates with unfeminine vehemence. Yesterday she seized Lord William (Russell) by both sides of his coat, I believe what is called collaring a



man, exclaiming, 'Why should we have Germans to reign over us!'"

Brougham, of course, as the queen's eloquent advocate, was an object of adoration to Lady Jersey. When he made his first appearance at one of the receptions of Lady Cowper (afterwards Lady Palmerston) the hostess exclaimed, "Dear me, what a fright!" "He *is* ugly," said Lady Granville. "Good God!" cried Lady Jersey, "I think him at times *quite beautiful*!"

Every one who has seen Brougham's portrait will appreciate the exquisite ludicrousness of her ladyship's exclamation. The *Beautiful* Brougham! Heavens!

When the Bill to "deprive Her Majesty Queen Caroline Amelia Elizabeth of the title, prerogatives, rights, privileges, and exemptions of Queen Consort of this realm, and to dissolve the marriage between His Majesty and the said Caroline Amelia Elizabeth," was read for a second time in the House of Lords and carried by a majority of twenty-eight, Lady Jersey was as near insanity as a woman well could be without actually passing the border of lunacy. But the supporters of the Bill split on the divorce clause; the bishops actually had conscientious scruples about granting a dissolution of marriage to such a notoriously unfaithful husband as George IV! Hence the third reading was passed only by a majority of nine. Lord Liverpool, the Premier, therefore thought it prudent



to withdraw the Bill, and the result was hailed by the people with frenzied delight as a victory for the wronged woman whose cause they had espoused as their own. Not since the acquittal of the Seven Bishops in the reign of James II. had London witnessed such rejoicings as those which welcomed the triumph of Queen Caroline. For three successive nights the streets were illuminated, and the whole population gave itself up to celebrating the humiliation of its despised and detested king. From Land's End to John o' Groat's House, deputations flocked to congratulate the queen upon the successful vindication of her innocence.

Lord and Lady Jersey, as staunch supporters of the queen, shared in her triumph. Their progress from London to Middleton Park was one long ovation. "You never," writes Lady Jersey to the Countess Granville, "saw anything like the joy of the country. All the way we came, people of every rank cheering, and in the towns the most respectable persons came to shake hands with Lord Jersey and thank him for his vote. The queen was in every one's mouth, in every one's hat, upon every cart, and in every house. They drew us in triumph through the towns, and there was not one person drunk."

And so the "beautiful Jersey" had her revenge, a sweet and ample one, on the royal "Gentleman" who had so grossly insulted her.

It was about this time that Thomas Creevey, who

knew every one, was a guest at Middleton, and he thus describes his hostess :

“Shall I tell you what Lady Jersey is like? She is like one of her numerous gold and silver musical dickey birds that are in all the showrooms of this house. She begins to sing at eleven o'clock, and, with the interval of the hour when she retires to her cage to rest, she sings till twelve at night without a moment's interruption. She changes her feathers for dinner, and her plumage both morning and evening is the happiest and most beautiful I ever saw. Of the merits of her songs I say nothing till we meet. In the meantime I will say that I presume we are getting on, for this morning her ladyship condescended to give me two fingers to shake, and last night asked me twice to give her my verses on the Duke of Northumberland, as she had mislaid and could not find the copy Gertrude Bennet had given her.”

To judge from that picture one might suppose Lady Jersey to have been a rather disagreeable mixture of loquacity and hauteur. But no single portrait of her by the pen of a contemporary does her justice. She was a bundle of contradictions—a woman so many-mooded and so many-sided, that no one who was but superficially acquainted with her, could form any conception of her real character, or judge which of her various moods most truly expressed her. As a political power she believed herself to be much more potent than she really was. But still she was *something* of a

power in politics, though the carrying of the Reform Bill of 1832 was a severe lesson to her of the limitations of her influence. She was "mad against Reform," as one of her contemporaries puts it. But when the thing was inevitable, she had the good sense to acquiesce in it, and even graciously condescended to receive back into favour the ringleader of the Reformers, that arch-hypocrite Brougham, who flattered her to the top of her bent.

But she often brought a hornet's nest about her ears by her indiscretions, both of tongue and temper. Thomas Creevey, writing on February 24th, 1831, says :

"There has been a charming scene at the Drawing-room to-day. Lady Jersey went up to Lord Durham in the greatest fury and in the presence of all the world said, 'Lord Durham, I hear that you have said things about me which are not true, and I desire that you will call upon me to-morrow and *bring a witness with you*. I have been shamefully calumniated and I will have justice done me!' Duncannon, who was present and heard this, was in horror of Lord Durham's reply. Lord D. turned as pale as death, and after a little hesitation, said very calmly, 'Lady Jersey, in all probability I shall never be at your house again.' "

Charles Greville, who also tells the story, was commissioned to act as mediator and he succeeded in patching up a truce, but Lady Jersey and Lord



Durham never ceased to hate one another cordially. The Duke of Wellington expressed his opinion on the episode tersely and characteristically: "What damned nonsense Lady Jersey talks!" A remark which would have somewhat surprised her ladyship, had any candid friend ventured to repeat it to her, for if there was one thing she plumed herself upon more than another it was her conquest of the duke. And she certainly had considerable influence over that iron warrior. For, Heine's "dull ghost, with an ashen-grey soul in a buckram body, a wooden smile on his freezing face" (how that passionate, mocking Ishmael of poets hated the conqueror of his god, Napoleon!), was always susceptible to the allurements of beauty, though he once pathetically declared, "No woman ever loved me."

He made a fool of himself over Madame Récamier in Paris after Waterloo—bored her with his "unmeaning notes which all resemble each other"—annoyed her by his persistent visits, till she closed her doors against him and refused to see him when he called. It is hard to believe that it was our own grim, eagle-beaked Arthur who wrote in this strain, "Every time I see you, I leave you more deeply impressed with your charms, and less disposed to give my attention to politics!" Yet it was thus that he addressed himself to Madame Récamier.

The amorous side of the duke's character has been ignored by his later biographers as derogatory to his



dignity, but it caused a good deal of amusement and scandal to his contemporaries. Lady Jersey availed herself of this weakness. There was, of course, nothing amatory on her part, she had no inclination that way. She was a woman incapable of passion and intolerant of intrigue. No *cavalier servente* was ever seen dangling at her heels. She knew well the value of her beauty, but scorned to use the vulgar arts of the coquette. Power, wealth, fashion, she worshipped and courted, but love had no charm for her. And she had little mercy for women who allowed themselves to be tempted to their fall. "She knew no crime," says Disraeli in *Coningsby* (through which, as Lady St. Julian, she flits a stately shadow), "except a woman not living with her husband, *that* was past pardon. So long as his presence sanctioned her conduct, however shameless, it did not signify, but if her husband were a brute, neglected his wife first and then deserted her ; then, if a breath but sullies her name, she must be crushed, unless indeed, her own family were powerful, which makes a difference, and sometimes softens immorality into indiscretion."

The Duke of Wellington was not the only eminent statesman whom she treated as a slave, and who passively submitted to play Hercules to her Omphale. And, as an instance of her imperious sway, of a sort, in politics, I may mention the serious discussion at one of Lady Holland's dinners, as to whether there would be any chance of the motion for the Admission of

Dissenters to the Universities coming on for debate on a certain night, or whether Lady Jersey would succeed in getting it postponed as she had a great dinner that evening. The general opinion was that the Ministry would not dare to let the debate on the measure clash with her ladyship's banquet, and that opinion was correct. The debate on the Bill had to give way to Lady Jersey's dinner and await her convenience. That was the kind of power she wielded in politics.

But it was in the Realm of Fashion that she really reigned. There she was Empress and Autocrat. Byron said of her that "she was the veriest tyrant that ever governed Fashion's fools and compelled them to shake their caps and bells as she willed it." She is herself credited with the cynical remark, "Treat people like fools and they will worship you; stoop to make up to them and they will directly tread you underfoot."

She made her mark in society the moment she entered it, though she had no "accomplishments" and trusted solely to her beauty and manner. But these were amply sufficient to win her all she wanted. She was one of the first to patronise the waltz, in which Prince Paul Esterhazy was her instructor. It created a tremendous sensation and was branded as horribly indecent. Byron's fierce satire only echoed the general sentiment. But Lady Jersey snapped her fingers at propriety and waltzed so divinely that she made

the dance fashionable. When the Czar of Russia was in London in 1814, he was fascinated by Lady Jersey's perfect waltzing and was never happy unless she was his partner. And this gave her especial delight, because the Regent was present at these balls and, as it was just after her quarrel with him, she knew how bitterly galled he was to see the interest which his illustrious guest took in the lady whom *he* had placed on his Black List.

But it is with "Almack's" that Lady Jersey's name is chiefly associated as a Queen of Fashion.

The New Almack's in Berkeley Street, Piccadilly, with its four hundred and fifty members of both sexes, prides itself on its exclusiveness as the aristocratic home of bridge. But, exclusive as it fondly believes itself to be, the New Almack's is in that respect not within measurable distance of the Old Almack's. And yet the most exclusive and aristocratic club in Europe was founded by a Scotch tavern-keeper—one MacCall, who transposed his name to Almack when he first came to London as valet to a nobleman. Like the canny, thrifty Scot he was, Almack saved money and resolved to invest it in clubs. His first venture was the Thatched House. It was a success, but nothing to compare with that of the club bearing his own name, which brought him fame and fortune.

Almack's was opened on February 20th, 1765, in the building afterwards in our own day known as Willis's Rooms in King Street, St. James's Street. Willis,



by the way, was Almack's heir and successor. A few days after the opening ceremony, over which H.R.H. the Duke of Cumberland, the hero (or "butcher") of Culloden, presided, "Gilly" Williams, writing to George Selwyn, thus describes the Club :

"There is now opened here, in three very elegant new-built rooms, a ten-guinea subscription, for which you have a ball and supper once a week for twelve weeks. You may imagine by the sum the company is chosen. . . . The men's tickets are not transferable, so if the ladies do not like us, they have no opportunity of changing us. . . . Our female Almacks flourish beyond description. Almack's Scotch face, in a bag-wig, waiting at supper, would divert you, as would his lady, in a sack, making tea and curtsying to the duchesses." It was a club of both sexes, which first met at a tavern to enjoy themselves, the members subsequently, according to Mrs. Boscawen, going to Almack's, in order to "satisfy Lady Pembroke's scruples." As the ladies nominated and selected the gentlemen to be admitted, and *vice versâ*, no lady could exclude a lady nor any gentleman a gentleman. Both exercised their veto freely. The Duchess of Bedford, Ladies Rochford, Harrington, and Holderness were blackballed by the gentlemen ; while Lord March ("Old Q.") and Brook Boothby, to their immense astonishment, were blackballed by the dames.

So that even then "Almack's" prided itself on its exclusiveness, and the entrée to the Club was in itself



a passport to the highest society. But the members were the enemies of all conventionality and in avowed revolt against all that Mrs. Grundy held most sacred. There was a licence about the revels there which shocked all who had any respect for decency and decorum.

A satirist, writing in 1773, says :

No censure reaches them at Almack's ball,  
Virtue, religion—they're above them all.

Three years earlier Horace Walpole writes to Mann : "The gaming at Almack's, which has taken the *pas* of White's, is worthy the decline of our Empire. The young men of the age lose ten, fifteen, twenty thousand pounds of an evening there. Lord Stavordale, not yet over one-and-twenty, lost £11,000 there last Tuesday, but reversed it at one great hand at hazard. He swore a great oath : 'Now, if I had been playing *deep*, I might have won millions.' His cousin, Charles Fox, shines equally here and in the House of Commons."

Note the phrase "decline of our Empire." To your shallow pessimist, ignorant of history, the Empire is always "declining" and "falling off," just as to your testy old fossil soldier "the service" is always "going to the dogs."

But in the early years of the nineteenth century a change "came o'er the spirit" of Almacks. It was transformed from a fashionable gambling hell into a great society institution, conducted on the strictest

principles of aristocratic etiquette. It was *the* Temple of Fashion, the very holy of holies of the worship of that pinchbeck goddess.

Primarily, the *raison d'être* of the Club was dancing, for which the fine ballroom, one hundred feet in length by fifty in width, with its lofty columns and pilasters, was eminently fitted. But, though proficiency in dancing was a *sine quâ non* to election, Almack's had higher objects than mere Terpsichorean amusement. Its destinies were ruled by a committee of six Lady Patronesses, Princess Esterhazy, Princess von Lieven, The Countess of Jersey, the Countess of Sefton, Lady Cowper, and Mrs. Drummond Burrell, afterwards Lady Willoughby d'Eresby.

"Of these grand dames," says Captain Gronow, "the most popular was unquestionably Lady Cowper, now Lady Palmerston. Lady Jersey's bearing, on the contrary, was that of a theatrical tragedy queen, and, whilst attempting the sublime, she frequently made herself simply ridiculous, being inconceivably rude and in her manner often ill-bred."

Nevertheless, it was Lady Jersey who was the real Empress of Almack's, to whose despotic sway all were compelled to submit. "The system of Almack's," says the anonymous author of a vigorous satire, entitled *The Key to Almack's*, "is altogether the most unnatural coalition that ever existed in society. A set of foolish women caballing together to keep the rest of the world in their trammels, who have no kind of

right to do so but what they choose to arrogate to themselves, is a very curious state of things certainly, but that they should have found hundreds of independent people silly enough to bend their necks to the yoke is the most extraordinary part of the story."

In this racy satire Lady Jersey, who figures under the pseudonym of Lady Hauton, is thus portrayed :

"But for celebrity and that kind of popularity which is conferred by general admiration none could compete with Lady Hauton ; she bore away the bell ; and was by general opinion proclaimed the leader of Fashion and the Queen of Almack's. While her colleagues were debating she decided ; hers was the master spirit that ruled the whole machine ; hers the eloquent tongue that could both persuade and command ; and she was never idle ; her restless eye pried into everything, she set the world to rights, her influence was resistless, her determination uncontrollable."

It was that tireless energy of hers that gave Lady Jersey her pre-eminence. None of her rivals could compete with her in that. *They* had their fits of lassitude and indolence in which they were inclined to let the world slide. But Lady Jersey never flagged in her zeal, never relaxed her vigilance. So conscientious was she in distributing vouchers for the balls that she insisted on ocular proof of dancing skill in every young applicant, no matter how eligible he or she might otherwise be. And she kept her

co-patronesses up to the mark in the matter of exclusiveness. How rigid was the line drawn may be gathered from the fact that a duke, a duchess, and three baronesses were blackballed. Of three hundred officers of the Guards not more than half-a-dozen were honoured with vouchers of admission to this sternly guarded temple. That such rigorous exclusiveness was highly resented by those who considered themselves insulted by rejection, is evident from the following amusing anecdote given by Captain Gronow in his *Reminiscences* :

“When duelling was at its height in England, the most absurd pretexts were made for calling a man out. I recollect that at one of the dinners at the Thatched House in St. James’s Street, Mr. Willis, the proprietor, in passing behind the chairs occupied by the company was accosted by a captain in the 3rd Guards in a rather satirical manner. Mr. Willis, smarting under the caustic remarks of the gallant captain, said aloud, ‘Sir, I wrote to you at the request of Lady Jersey, saying that as her ladyship was unacquainted with you, I had been instructed to reply to your letter by stating that the Lady Patroness declined sending you a ticket for the ball.’ This statement, made in a public room, greatly irritated the captain ; his friends in vain endeavoured to calm his wrath, and he sent a cartel the following day to Lord Jersey, requesting he would name his second, etc. Lord Jersey replied in a very dignified manner, saying



that, if all persons who did not receive tickets from his wife were to call him to account for want of courtesy on her part, he should have to make up his mind to become a target for young officers, and he therefore declined the honour of the proposed meeting."

And the laws of Almack's were Draconian in their severity. The most distinguished of its members dared not commit the slightest breach of the rules without paying the penalty. Here for example is an incident described in the *Life, Letters, and Journals*, of George Ticknor, the American historian :

"After dining one day at Lord Downshire's, Mr. Ticknor accompanied the ladies to Almack's. On this evening Lady Jersey was the patroness. She was then at the height of beauty and brilliant talent, a leader in society and with decided political opinions.

"Before going to the ball Lady Downshire called at Lady Mornington's, and Mr. Ticknor went in with her and her daughters. While they were there, the Duke of Wellington came in, and being asked if he was going to Almack's, said 'he thought he should look in by-and-by.'

"A rule had lately been announced by the patronesses that no one would be received later than eleven o'clock. When the Downshires thought it time to go, the duke said he would join them there later, on which his mother said to him, 'Ah, Arthur, you had better go in season, for you know Lady

Jersey will make no allowance for you.' He remained, however.

"A short time after the Downshire party had entered the ballroom, and had been received by Lady Jersey, Mr. Ticknor was still standing with her, and heard one of the attendants say to her, 'Lady Jersey, the Duke of Wellington is at the door and desires to be admitted.' 'What o'clock is it?' she asked. 'Seven minutes after eleven, your ladyship.' She paused for a moment, and then said with emphasis and distinctness, 'Give my compliments—give Lady Jersey's compliments to the Duke of Wellington, and say that she is very glad that the first enforcement of the rule of exclusion is such, that hereafter no one can complain of its application. He cannot be admitted.' "

On another occasion the duke was refused admission because he appeared in black trousers instead of the regulation knee-breeches. He apologised for being ignorant of the rule, but, like a good soldier, submitted without a murmur to the order of dismissal.

All this exclusiveness made admission to the charmed circle the more prized. To be enrolled among the members of Almack's was to enter the seventh heaven of London's Paradise.

And this world of fashion over which Lady Jersey reigned as Queen—what was it like? Well, it was what it always has been—a dull stereotyped repetition of its forerunners, a hundred, two hundred, three

hundred years before. Here is a picture of a fashionable woman's life under the Jersey régime, sketched by the caustic pen of the author of *The Key to Almack's* :

“How was the morning spent? Of course in the usual style of a fine lady's morning. The London season had yet scarcely commenced, but the preliminaries were already *en train*.

A thousand cards a day at doors to leave,  
And in return, a thousand cards receive,

is one great employment of all women of fashion. And then there is always that delightful resource, shopping, to occupy every idle hour. So many lounges, *pour passer le temps* and empty the pockets; that ruination shop in Waterloo Place; the various bazaars; and afterwards some new novel to inquire for at Andrews's, though that tiresome man has never got the thing at home you most want. Boosey's classical foreign music shop, probably, comes next. Then, after showing yourself sufficiently often in Bond Street, St. James's Street, and Pall Mall, drive off, post-haste, to the dear enchanting Park, as the latest and best resort; where, if the crowd will permit, you may *see* your friends, at least, though without any chance of speaking to them, and be choked with dust, if you escape being broiled by the unintercepted rays of the sun. Oh! it is a rational life, at the very best, this same interesting mode of passing time in London; and we of the nineteenth century are a most philosophical sort of people, in very

truth. What with the busy lives of the very idle, and the idle lives of the very busy, it would seem most difficult to determine which is best—‘*ne rien faire,*’ ou ‘*ne faire que des riens.*’

And then, as a climax to the day’s delights, came dancing at Almack’s, with all the fascinating monotony of its inane flirtations and exchanges of dreary platitudes ; where some tried to be gay, some sentimental, and some witty, and all went home to bed flustered and bored, and looking like ghastly painted dolls in the sickly glare of dawn.

Now, by way of a companion picture, in proof of my contention that women of fashion are pretty nearly the same in every age, I will ask the reader to forgive me for presenting a portrait of one of the genus sketched a hundred years earlier by Vanbrugh in *The Provoked Wife*, a play first produced in 1697. To make the scene intelligible I must explain that Sir John Brute, disguised in his wife’s dress, has joined in a drunken midnight frolic, has been taken by the constable and watchmen before a Justice of the Peace and is still supposed to be a Lady of Quality.

“*Justice.* Pray, madam, what may be your ladyship’s common method of life? If I may presume so far.

“*Sir John.* Why, sir, that of a woman of quality.

“*Justice.* Pray, how may you generally pass your time, madam? Your morning for example!

“*Sir John.* Sir, like a woman of quality. I wake



about two o'clock in the afternoon, I stretch and make a sign for my chocolate. When I have drank three cups I slide down again upon my back, with my arms over my head : while my two maids put on my stockings. Then, hanging upon their shoulders, I'm trailed to my great chair, where I sit down and yawn for my breakfast. If it don't come presently, I lie down upon my couch, to say my prayers, while my maid reads me the play-bills.

*"Justice.* Very well, madam.

*"Sir John.* When the tea is brought in I drink twelve regular dishes, with eight slices of bread and butter : and half an hour after, I send to the cook to know if the dinner is almost ready.

*"Justice.* So, madam.

*"Sir John.* By that time my head is half dressed. I hear my husband swearing himself into a state of perdition that the meat's all cold upon the table. To amend which I come down in an hour more and have it sent back to the kitchen to be all dressed over again.

*"Justice.* Poor man !

*"Sir John.* When I have dined and my idle servants are presumptuously set down at their ease to do so too, I call for my coach, to go to visit fifty dear friends, of whom I hope I shall never find one at home while I shall live.

*"Justice.* So ! there's the morning and afternoon pretty well disposed of. Pray, how, madam, do you pass your evenings ?

"*Sir John.* Like a woman of spirit, sir : of great spirit. Give me a box and dice. Seven's the main ! Come, sir, I set you a hundred pound ! Why, do you think women are married nowadays to sit at home and mend napkins ? Oh ! the Lord help your head !

"*Justice.* Mercy on us, Mr. Constable ! What will this age come to ?

"*Constable.* What will it come to indeed, if such women as this are not set in the stocks !"

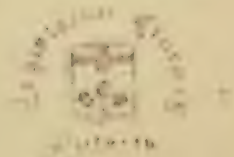
Go back another century further and read William Harrison's account of the woman of fashion in the "spacious times of great Elizabeth," and you will find the same distinguishing traits.

It is this changelessness which is to my thinking the unique charm of the woman of fashion—a charm which the maid-servant alone of her sex shares with her. One has only to read Swift's *Directions to Servants*, and Defoe's *Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business*, to know that the cooks and housemaids and parlour-maids of to-day are distinguished by precisely the same qualities as those of two hundred years ago. The fine lady and the humble abigail have the same fascination for me as I look back over the centuries and note with delight how from age to age they have retained their characteristics, with an unswerving constancy which defies the tooth of time. Satirists have lashed them, pulpiteers have thundered at them—in vain. Each has kept to her groove and never altered. It is a pity that our eloquent, if somewhat hysterical, latter-day satirists of

fashion do not add a slight study of history to their oratorical or literary accomplishments. They would then perhaps realise the absurdity of regarding as symbols of decadence, characteristics which have marked the women of fashion for centuries. The "Smart Set" of to-day are immorally on much the same level as their predecessors, though of a smaller breed, inferior in audacity and resource. The woman of fashion will always, in essentials, be the same. She cannot change. And there is no need to be dismayed at her grotesque little freaks and monkey tricks ; they have no significance whatever. Time has proved it.

Dr. Johnson, who hated all cant, was, Bozzy tells us, at all times watchful to repress the vulgar cant against the manners of the great. "High People, sir," said he, "are the best : take a hundred ladies of quality, you'll find them better wives, better mothers, more willing to sacrifice their own pleasure to their children than a hundred other women." And when Boswell ventured to remark, "the notion of the world, sir, however, is that the morals of women of quality are worse than those in lower stations," the oracle came down upon him in thunder.

"Yes, sir, the licentiousness of one woman of quality makes more noise than that of a number of women in lower stations. Then, sir, you are to consider the malignity of the other women against women of quality, which will make them believe anything of them. No, sir, so far as I have observed, the higher





in rank and the richer ladies are, they are the better instructed and the more virtuous."

I do not care to inquire how far old Sam Johnson was right in that remarkable pronouncement, but at any rate the six noble patronesses of Almack's bore out his statement. They were all, despite their worship of Folly, eminently virtuous. Lady Jersey was a pattern of propriety, and gave the world proof that the life of a woman of fashion was compatible with the exercise of all the minor moralities. And what more can Mrs. Grundy require or expect?

There were two points on which Lady Jersey prided herself, outside the empire of fashion, which argue some lack of the sense of humour. She was firmly convinced that she was a first-rate woman of business, and kept up the self-delusion by dining regularly every week with her co-partners at Child's Bank. There was quite a little flutter in Fleet Street when "Queen Sarah's" handsome carriage was seen to drive up to the dingy old house at Temple Bar, and a gorgeous footman assisted my lady to descend from her chariot and enter the grimy portals of the establishment which Dickens has immortalised as "Telson's." She was proud of her position as senior partner and, perhaps, no flattery had a sweeter savour to her than the obsequious homage of the City magnates, who professed the highest admiration for her business capacity.

That she had powers of administration and organisa-



tion her rule over Almack's proved, but they were conspicuous by their absence in the control of her own household. Her servants robbed her shamelessly and prodigiously without exciting her suspicions. High life below stairs at Middleton Park and Berkeley Square was conducted on a scale more lavish and extravagant than high life above stairs. There was champagne, hock, and Tokay flowing like water in the steward's room, the maids appropriated her ladyship's dresses and flaunted themselves impudently in *her* finery, the tradesmen's accounts were cooked—all her retainers combined to swindle her. Lord Jersey was far too lazy to look into affairs himself, and, like others, was deluded into the belief that his wife was an admirable manager and a perfect practitioner of domestic economy. Lady Jersey's eyes, however, were opened when she was told that her housekeeper had been measured for a riding-habit, the facsimile of her own, purloined as a pattern, and was negotiating for the purchase of one of Lord Jersey's superfluous hacks. Then it dawned upon her ladyship that her trusted comptroller had been feathering her nest finely by a liberal interpretation of "perquisites," and the prospective equestrienne was promptly dismissed.

The other point on which Lady Jersey plumed herself was the careful training of her daughters. She talked of their education as if she herself personally superintended it. In reality the young Ladies Villiers saw very little of their mother. They lived in a

separate wing of the great house at Middleton, and had a separate establishment. At a stated time every day they paid a formal visit to their mother to repeat the Catechism and receive instructions for their diurnal exercise and evening toilet. They came down to dessert and family prayers, which Lady Jersey read every evening. At this religious service all the maids were compelled to attend and they trooped in, wearing their mistress's laces, silk stockings (at four guineas a pair) and gold-embroidered handkerchiefs, under her very nose!

The governesses chosen to educate the girls were always foreigners; indeed Lady Jersey would only have French spoken by her children in her presence. How they hated the infliction and how they loved their father's English, and the relief of talking to him in their native tongue!

The unfortunate governess had a bad time. For, besides the formal attendances which Lady Jersey exacted from her daughters, she paid flying duty-visits every morning to the school-room and held a general examination every week.

One conscientious Italian tutoress was driven to frenzy by her ladyship's putting this question in her examination: "How long did the Romans stay in America and in what part were their encampments?" This was too much for the teacher, she wrote a letter of protest to Lady Jersey, who had sense enough to see that she had put her foot in it. Her ladyship,

with an injured air, remarked, "*Je croyais vous assister*"; but the examinations were thenceforward discontinued.

She was always strong in her insistence on the importance of religious teaching. Her formula to each governess was, "*Je veux que leur première pensée tous les matins sort à Dieu.*" One would like to have heard the governess carrying out these pious instructions!

In society Lady Jersey was regarded by most people as proud and conceited. She had a way of showing too obtrusively her consciousness that her diamonds were larger and her beauty more splendid than those of all rivals. But she laid, or tried to lay, her pride and hauteur aside when she mixed with her tenants at their annual balls. Her charity, too, was unbounded. She had a host of pensioners, old and infirm folk, for whom she provided comfortable houses and liberal annuities. Her Christmas doles were munificent, and yet she was not popular. She had not the gift of making herself loved by those beneath her in station. The very recipients of her benefactions grumbled, because she did not *give the presents herself*, as "the wicked Lady Jersey used to do." She had no sympathy. She was out of touch with her dependents. There was a cold aloofness about her charity which robbed it of all human charm. For flesh-and-blood resents the automatic almsgiving of the callous rich, "who care not how they give."



Lady Jersey, in short, was only in her element in society. There, her unfailing taste and tact condoned her imperious manners. As a rule she knew how far she could carry her arbitrary power without exciting her subjects to revolt. And they certainly gave her an obedience which was almost servile. Any law she laid down was implicitly obeyed. To distinguish parvenus from exclusives she commanded the latter to adopt any ridiculous shibboleth she chose to originate. Thus to be "sealed of the tribe" of Jersey one must "be drove in a charrot," or "wear a goold ring," or "have chopped hands." These eccentricities of pronunciation were the recognised hall-mark of high fashion. One of the absurd lingual affectations originated by Lady Jersey still lingers in the speech of the "Upper Ten"—to wit, the clipped "g": *e.g.* "starvin'," "owin'," "comin'." It is by some considered to be as essentially the badge of the *haut ton* as the dropped aspirate is of the unmitigated cockney. It is odd that the extremes of society should meet in common debasement of the King's English. One asks in wonderment, why this brutal assault upon these two letters of the alphabet? What crime have the letters "G" and "H" committed that they should be subjected to such cruel and wanton ill-usage?

Lady Jersey certainly did not spare herself in her lofty ambition to rule society for its good. She was fastidious in her dress to a degree which bordered on



fanaticism. She changed every article of clothing from head to foot *four times a day*. But in this respect she was outdone by the then Empress of Russia, who wore three different costumes *every night* and insisted on the ladies of the Court doing the same!

Time dealt kindly with Lady Jersey, with of course the usual liberal assistance from art. When, at the age of sixty, she appeared at a grand fancy ball as a Sultana, in sky-blue cashmere robe, embroidered in coral, with white-and-gold turban—the gift of Count Wornozoff, Governor of Circassia—she looked nobly handsome and was the most striking, if not the most beautiful, figure there. It was said that she preserved her beauty by using gruel instead of soap and water in her ablutions; whatever the recipe may have been it was certainly successful, for she unquestionably did preserve her beauty till she was quite an old woman.

Time, too, softened down many asperities in her character. "Lady Jersey," says the Countess Granville, writing of her friend when she was sixty-five, "is as pleasant *à vivre* as she used to be rugged. Never comes near me but when I propose it, and then is as good-natured and pleasurable as it is possible to be." And again, when she was verging on seventy, "Lady Jersey is a very good-natured old woman."

But those who saw her only in society little dreamt at what cost of suffering, and by what heroic self-control she attained that stately composure which she

exhibited to the world. For her life was darkened and embittered by many sorrows. One by one she saw her children die before her in their prime.

No one but Lord Jersey knew how terribly these successive bereavements affected his wife. She gave way to long and agonising spells of grief, during which she would bear no one near her but her husband, and even from him she would listen to no word of sympathy. He could only watch her in silence, fearful that her mind would give way under the strain. He must have wondered when, after one of these long prostrations of agony, Lady Jersey resumed her place in the world of fashion and queened it as superbly and calmly as ever, whether this could indeed be the grief-stricken woman by whose side he had kept weary hours of vigil.

In 1858 her beautiful and beloved daughter Clementina died. She was her father's darling. Her death broke his heart, and within a year he was laid by her side in the family vault at Middleton.

But Lady Jersey's cup of sorrow was not yet full. Three weeks after his father's death her eldest son, the sixth earl, died. Before the first year of her widowhood had closed came the sudden death of her one remaining daughter, Adela ; and in 1862 her last surviving child, John Francis, followed the rest "behind the veil." Widowed and childless, she herself lived on till she had entered her eighty-second year. On January 26th, 1867, she died at her house in

Berkeley Square from the sudden rupture of a blood-vessel.

For fifty years she reigned as Empress of Fashion. Season after season her parties were the gayest, her balls the most brilliant. At her *salon* were seen the most distinguished men in Europe. The Czar, Nicholas I., the Kings of Prussia, Hanover, Holland, and Belgium had all enjoyed her hospitality and paid tribute to her fascination.

As a leader of society she had but one rival among her contemporaries who could be called her peer. Lady Palmerston ran her very close in the race for political and social supremacy and was, in the opinion of many, Lady Jersey's superior in grace and charm of temper and manners. But as a Queen of Beauty she had to yield place to Lady Jersey.

I do not suppose that any contemporary estimate of Lady Jersey's character can be accepted as being either just or exhaustive. She had many enemies, jealous of her power—smarting, most of them, under her high-handed methods and her imperial scorn. From these one can only expect ill-natured criticism. Impartial critics are almost unanimous in her praise. Madame de Staël thought her a "sensible, beautiful Englishwoman." George Ticknor has recorded his opinion of her as "a beautiful creature, with a great deal of talent, taste, and elegant knowledge."

But perhaps Charles Greville, whose judgments were usually sound when there was no personal or



political pique to bias him, may be trusted to have come as near as any to the truth in his portrait.

"Lady Jersey," he says, "is an extraordinary woman, and has many good qualities; surrounded as she is by flatterers and admirers, she is neither proud nor conceited. She is full of vivacity, spirit, and good nature, but the wide range of her sympathies and affections proves that she has more general benevolence than particular sensibility in her character. She performs all the ordinary duties of life with great correctness, because her heart is naturally good; and she is perhaps from her temperament exposed to fewer temptations than the generality of her sex. She is deficient in passion and softness (which constitute the greatest charm in women), so that she excites more of admiration than of interest. In conversation she is lively and pleasant, without ever being very remarkable, for she has neither wit, nor imagination, nor humour; her understanding is active rather than strong, and her judgment is too often warped by prejudice to be sound. She has a retentive memory and a restless mind, together with a sort of intellectual arrangement, with which she appears rather to have been gifted by nature than to have derived from the cultivation of her reasoning faculties."

It is clear to me that Lady Jersey possessed a sterling royalty of nature. The capacity she displayed in ruling her mimic world of fashion would have fitted her for any throne in Europe. She would have been



no lay-figure as the consort of emperor or king. And she had her *good* qualities too—thus bearing out my contention that *goodness* of some sort has almost always been a potent factor in the sway of the greatest Queens of Beauty.



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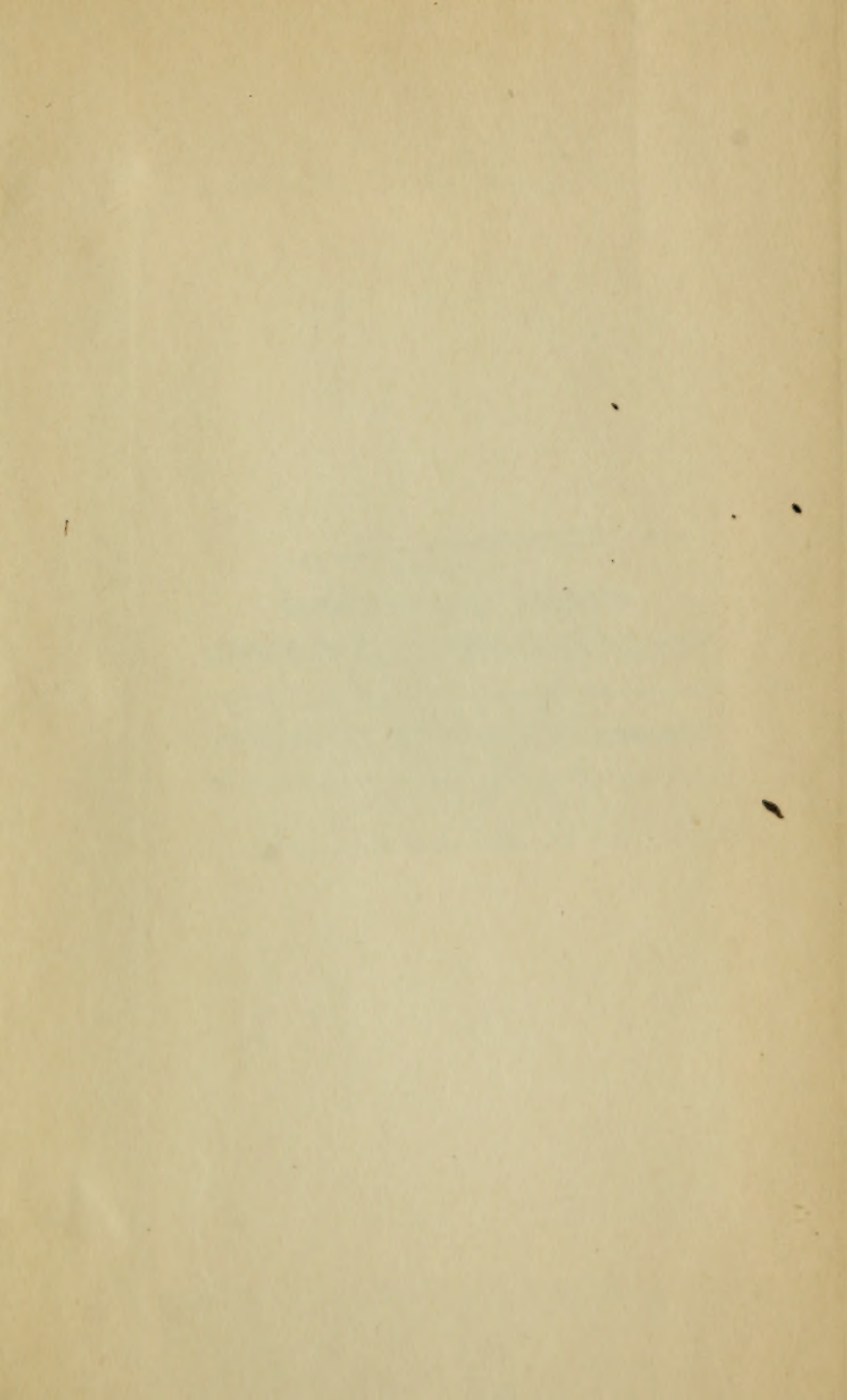
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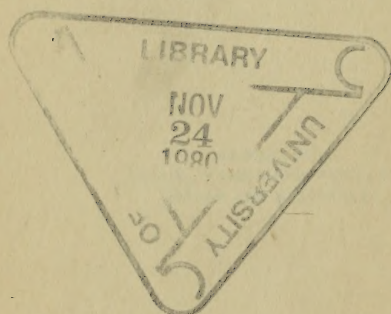
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